STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF EVERY MONTH IN COMICS FEATURE

STAN REVEALS HOW TO WRITE COMICS!

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AN EXCLUSIVE

Alpha Flight

LIVE FROM L.A.!
RAY BRADBURY
TALKS TO
CHUCK JONES

MARVEL'S MYSTIC MAGE
DOCTOR STRANGE

INVESTING TIPS
FROM MIKE BENTON

PLUS YOUR MONTHLY COMICS GUIDE

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HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS

The verdict is in! Everyone seems to love our "Turning Pro" issue. Lurking inside of every comic book fan is the soul of a writer/artist. The mail makes it clear that you would like to see more of the same. So—jumping quickly when a paying customer beckons—we are putting our best man on the job. Beginning this issue, Stan the Man, creator and initial writer of many popular heroes, launches a new series in his column: How to Write Comics. And trust Happy Hal, this teacher knows his subject.

The most popular single story in each issue of **Comics Feature** is the cover feature. Each of these profiles your favorite heroes and offers the thoughts of the editors, writers and artists who make the magic work. Let's let Contributing Editor James Van Hise, the man behind so many cover features, tell us how he pulls it off.

"My behind-the-scenes function is one of the most obvious—helping to make sure that you have something interesting to read.

"First and formost is the major cover feature. How is this arrived at? Believe it or not, you help decide what it will be. How? By the comics you read and actively support. We learn what comics fans are reading most actively and then we just assume that you'd want to know about those titles. Thus I've most recently written major features on **Spider-Man**, **The Avengers** and **Alpha Flight**. But articles like these require more than just the information you can obtain by reading your own comics collection. It requires learning what goes on behind-the-scenes at the comic book itself.

"For example, I start this by contacting Marvel's Public Relations representative, Steve Saffel. I explain what I want to cover and who I'd like to interview. Steve is very helpful and often suggests others who would also provide useful information. Being that **Comics Feature** is based in California and Marvel Comics is in New York, my interviews are usually done by telephone.

"When an artist, writer or editor calls the office out here, the result can sometimes be amusing. When **Alpha Flight** artist David Ross phoned in, the person answering the phone thought he said it was David Lee Roth (late of Van Halen). And you can imagine what happened when **Daredevil** editor Ralph Macchio returned my call!

"When interviewing the creative people on a character, I always try to find out not just what the future holds, but how they view the characters they write, draw and edit. Do they approach the character differently from previous creative teams?

"In organizing all of this information, I hope to make the character in focus more interesting for you to read about because of what you've learned in my article.

"What do I have coming up? A feature on Frank Miller's return to **Daredevil** and an overview on Marvel's plans for their 25th anniversary year—1988."

Looks like he's some exciting features planned for us!

We're finally getting some letters! Not enough, though—so send loads more. They told me begging on hands and knees wouldn't work and that it wasn't dignified. I proved them wrong, but they never mentioned the scraped knees.

The advertising department asked me to point out our new FAN MARKETPLACE classified ad section to you. They say it'll begin next issue and it's a nice, cheap, effective way to let everyone know that you have comic books, strips, animation cels, etc. to sell and trade or what you want to buy or to just ask for pen pals. You know—they're probably right!

—Happy Hal

COMICS FEATURE

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FEATURES

TAKING OFF WITH ALPHA FLIGHT

Marvel's team of Canadian superheroes was John Byrne's major contribution to the world of mutants. Now they are in the hands of veteran writer Bill Mantlo and newcomer artist David Ross. Where will the team go now? James Van Hise talks to all those involved and gives us the full story. Plus—an exclusive look at the original pencils!

PLUS A LOOK AT CLOAK & DAGGER

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FEATURE NEWS

SPECIAL PROJECTS FOR MARVEL'S 25th

1986 is the 25th anniversary of Marvel Comics, the heir to Atlas (the original 1950s incarnation) and Timely. Yet **The Fantastic Four** was the only 'real' Marvel out back in 1961.

To celebrate their anniversary, Marvel plans something pretty special. Efforts center, fittingly, on the FF.

Mary Wilshire, the penciller of**Red Sonja, New Mutants** and **Firestar**, and John Byrne plan an Invisible Girl miniseries for openers.

There will also be a very special triple-sized issue of **Fantastic Four** 296.

Also planned is a newfold X-Men series.

The X-Men is one of the most popular series in the history of comics, yet many of today's readers missed those early, classic issues that introduced the "new" mutant super-team.

Classic X-Men, a new monthly series beginning in May, will reprint those hard-to-get issues, complete with expanded stories and all-new material by Chris Claremont and John Bolton.

Issue 1 opens with a 10-page excerpt from **Giant-Size X-Men 1**. It is followed by a new 20-page tale by Claremont and Bolton providing a bridge between the events of **Giant-Size** 1 and **X-Men 94**.

That story reveals the reasons the original X-Men decided to leave the team, and the reasons the new members decided to stay.

With issue 2, each issue of **Classic X-Men** will feature 17 pages of reprinted story from the original issues, along with 5 additional pages of story illustrated by the original artist, starting with **X-Men 94** by Claremont and Dave Cockrum.

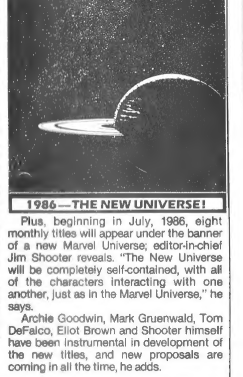
In addition to new pages drawn by Cockrum, Chris and John Bolton will create new 10-page stories each issue revealing untold tales of the X-Men. Issue 2 shows the beginning of the friendship between Jean and Storm, and 3 is the funeral of Thunderbird.

Art Adams and John Bolton will be the regular cover artists for the series. Each issue will be 32 pages, no ads, priced at $1.00.

"We decided not to begin with all of **Giant-Size** 1 since it had been reprinted so recently," Editor Ann Nocenti explains. "Instead, we're opening with the events leading up to **X-Men 94**, and Chris, Dave and John will take it from there."

Each story will be expanded to fill-in details that couldn't be included originally due to lack of space, and to answer questions that have cropped up over the years, she added. The backup stories will often take place within the same time frame as the main material, though they won't be held to that limitation.

"With **Classic X-Men**, Chris will finally have the opportunity to expand and revise those original adventures with the kind of care the material deserves," she says. "It's the kind of series fans have been demanding for for a long time."



1986—THE NEW UNIVERSE!

Plus, beginning in July, 1986, eight monthly titles will appear under the banner of a new Marvel Universe; editor-in-chief Jim Shooter reveals. "The New Universe will be completely self-contained, with all of the characters interacting with one another, just as in the Marvel Universe," he says.

Archie Goodwin, Mark Gruenwald, Tom DeFalco, Eliot Brown and Shooter himself have been instrumental in development of the new titles, and new proposals are coming in all the time, he adds.

FIRST TO PUBLISH "OZ" GRAPHIC NOVELS

First Comics will publish a series of original graphic novels based on characters and concepts from renowned childrens' author L. Frank Baum's world famous Oz books, according to publisher Rick Obadiah. "These graphic novels will feature all new stories continuing the adventures of Baum's most popular characters, like Dorothy and the Scarecrow," Obadiah explains, "and introduce some brand new ones as well, like Drox the flying swordfish."

The Oz graphic novels are being written and drawn by twenty-two year old Eric Shanower.

"Eric's enthusiasm, dedication and lifelong involvement with the Oz material enable him to create new stories which carry the essence of the source material, in both a literary and artistic sense," comments Rick Oliver, First's editorial director. "His artwork is reminiscent of the work of John R. Neill, the illustrator most closely associated with Oz, having provided the art for over thirty Oz books, including all but one of Baum's original Oz novels."

The Oz graphic novels will introduce new characters and storylines as well as expand on those from the Oz books in the public domain. The first five books, published between 1900 and 1909, currently fall in that category, and all 14 original Baum novels will be in the public domain by 1994.

First Comics is planning a major promotion campaign, including advertising in major family-oriented consumer magazines and bookstore trade publications, to introduce the series. "The Oz material has always been 'for children of all ages,' " Oliver notes, "and this series of graphic novels will appeal to young school children, parents with pre-schoolers and anyone who ever read an Oz book or saw the movie version of **The Wizard of Oz**."

Published in trade paperback format, each graphic novel in the series will be 48 pages long, with full-color reproduction on high-quality paper. The first First Oz graphic novel, **The Enchanted Apples of Oz**, will be released in April 1986, with a second scheduled for October.

JUST WHAT DID HAPPEN IN THE DC CRISIS?

GIORDANO, WOLFMAN AND GREENBERGER EXPLAIN

Apparently fans aren't the only people confused by the many important events that occurred in the most popular maxiseries that DC Comics has ever published, **Crisis On Infinite Earths**. Marv Wolfman and Bob Greenberger have issued a list denoting which characters were killed during the crisis and Executive Editor Dick Giordano has sent out a special memo to all DC Comics writers and editors.

The purpose of both documents is to see that the series accomplishes the goals that it set out to achieve: simplifying and clarifying the DC universe once and for all and for all time. The hope is that it will not be messed up again due to confusion!

Among the points made by Giordano in his memo are the following:

1) Only superheroes remember that there ever was a Crisis. The only exception is the Psycho-Pirate who is considered insane.
2) The new DC universe is retroactive to the beginning of time. Parallel universes are cut down to two: the regular universe covered in the comic books on a regular basis and the negative matter universe established in the maxiseries. Alternate dimensions do continue to exist however, including Gemworld and Apokolops.
3) The Golden Age counterparts of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, the Spectre, et al, will not appear in the DC universe. The characters, ex post facto, are deemed never to have existed.
4) Incidents existing in the DC universe and characters in the DC universe are only those as shown in the maxiseries or that are introduced into the comic books from this time forward.

The list created by Marv Wolfman and Bob Greenberger of characters who met their demise in the Crisis includes the following:

Issue 1—Crime Syndicate, Alex Luthor
Issue 3—Losers, Nighthawk, Kid Psycho
Issue 4—Lord Volt, Liana, The Monitor
Issue 7—Supergirl
Issue 8—The Flash
Issue 9—Alexi Luthor
Issue 10—Psimon, Starman 3, Immortal Man, Aquagirl, Icicle, Maaldor, Mirror Master, Shaggy Man, Chemo
Issue 11—Angle-Man
Issue 12—Sunburst, Dove, Bandit, Clayface 2, Lori Lemaris, Earth-2 Green Arrow, Prince Ra-Man, Kole, Huntress, Earth-2 Robin, Anti-Monitor

In addition, issue four saw the introduction of Lady Quark and a new Dr. Light, number six introduced the new Wildcat, number twelve saw Kid Flash become The Flash in honor of the death of Barry Allen and the final appearance of Earth-2 Superman, Earth-Prime Superboy, Alex Luthor Jr. and Earth-2 Lois Lane.

Okay? Everything clear? If it still isn't, don't despair. There will be an **Index to Crisis On Infinite Earths** written by former **Comics Feature** contributor Murray Ward and published by the Independent Comics Group.

MIKE GOLD JOINS DC COMICS EDITORIAL STAFF

Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano has announced Mike Gold's addition to the DC Comics Editorial department as Senior Editor. His new responsibilities will include developing and editing new projects.

"Mike's extensive experience in comics, particularly in editorial and marketing capacities, makes him the ideal person to join our staff," notes Giordano.

"I'm extremely proud to get in on the ground floor of DC's second fifty years," explains Gold. "There are a lot of exciting things going on at DC, and it's great to be able to be part of the action. I'm looking forward to the creative opportunities offered and to working with good friends."

Mike brings to DC Comics his extensive experience in the comic book industry and his 18 years as a writer and broadcaster.

He began his career as a sportswriter for the **Skokie** (IL) **News** in 1967, has been contributing editor of **Fantastic Films** since 1978, was managing editor of **Video Action** magazine between 1979 and 1981, has worked as newsman, talk show host and disc jockey for numerous Chicago radio stations and has produced several nationally syndicated radio programs and a number of television spots.

Mike co-founded the Chicago Comicon Comic Art Convention in 1975 and has been co-sponsor or consultant to the organization since its inception.

His work in the youth social services field includes co-founding the National Runaway Switchboard in 1974; commissioning public service posters from such comic book artists as Dick Giordano, Joe Staton, Mike Saenz and underground comic artist Skip Williamson; and establishing local and national programs around drug abuse, abandoned and abused children and runaway youth issues.

Gold was most recently Managing Editor at the Chicago-based First Comics Inc., which he co-founded in 1981.

STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF

Hi, True Believers, it's Culture Time again!

I'm sure you'll be thrilled to know that I finally finished sifting through all the letters we received in answer to the question I asked you—what do you want me to write about on these pages each month?

After wading through the mountain of mail—well, I'll admit it's not really a mountain, but it sounds beeter than calling it an anthill, right?—I can now announce the answer to the question that's been on everybody's lip (Elliot Everybody, our office boy) for lo these many months!

Okay, are you ready for this?

Most of the letters requested that we devote these imperishable columns to the titanic topic of—how to write for comic books!

As ever, your wish is my command. Not to mention the fact that it's easier for me to dwell upon that subject than to dream up something new each issue.

So, sharpen your pencils and your pointy little heads. Here's where I tell you everything I know about writing comics—which'll probably take about a minute and a half.

But before we start, you've got to make one promise. After you've read and absorbed all the priceless info I'll be feeding you, you've got to pledge not to use your wealth of new knowledge to compete for my job. I really oughtta have my head examined for giving away all sorts of tremendous literary tips and creating more competition for myself, but that's the price I pay for being such an unselfish, good-hearted, truly wonderful person.

And now, here's lots of stuff you oughtta know, and probably far more than you want to know, about writing for comic books.

PART ONE:
UNDERSTANDING THE COMIC BOOK

You can't write a good comic book story unless you understand what a good comic book story is, and isn't. So, suppose we try to figure out what makes a good comic book story.

First of all, let's make a few important distinctions. A comic book is quite a bit different from a comic strip. When someone refers to a comic strip, that usually denotes one of the strips you'll find in your daily or Sunday newpaper. Comic strips are also often called syndicated strips, because they are produced for newspaper syndicates (such as King Features Syndicate, **Beetle Bailey**, **Hagar the Horrible** etc., or Cowles Syndicate, **The Family Circus**, **Spider-Man**, etc., or Universal Press Syndicate, **Doonesbury**, **Downstown**, etc. You get the idea).

A syndicated strip generally has two or three panels a day and a Sunday color version which has approximately six panels. The style of writing is quite different from the writing of a comic book. In a syndicated comic strip, panel #1 is usually a recapitulation of what happened the day before. Panel #2 usually carries the story forward a bit, and panel #3 is generally the cliff-hanger. So you can see how very limited the comic strip is in comparison to the scope afforded a comic book story.

By the way, we're mainly going to be discussing writing superhero/fantasy stories for comic books, because they're the type that most of you are interested in. So, the points we'll be making will not necessarily apply to other types of strips. For those of you who want to write comedy, for example, perhaps we'll do another series of articles later on, as soon as I develop a sense of humor.

Okay, back to basics. Now that we know a comic book story isn't a comic strip story, let's see what in the name of Irving Forbush it actually is.

As you all know, a comic book is a magazine that is usually published once a month, or occasionally once every two months. Naturally, there are also annuals and special editions, but we needn't bother with those now.

One of the best things about a comic book story is the fact that you have so much room to work in. Compared to the two or three panel newspaper comic strip, comic books afford the writer page after page in which to tell his story.

In comic books, depending upon your editor's instructions, you can either write a complete story in one issue, or write a mini-epic that continues from issue to issue. This is very similar to tv shows. Some of them are complete in themselves, like **The A-Team** or **Knight Rider**, while some continue from

HOW TO WRITE FOR COMIC BOOKS

Presenting For Your Consideration. . .

Introducing and establishing the Who, What and Where of your character.

AS YOU MAY HAVE GATHERED, PETER PARKER WAS FAR FROM BEING THE BIGGEST MAN ON CAMPUS! BUT, HIS UNCLE BEN THOUGHT HE WAS A PRETTY SPECIAL LAD...
YOU'RE NOT FOOLIN' ME, PETEY! I KNOW YOU'RE AWAKE -- AND IT'S TIME FOR SCHOOL!
GOSH, UNCLE BEN--YOU'RE WORSE THAN A ROOM FULL OF ALARM CLOCKS!
AS FOR PETE'S AUNT MAY, SHE THOUGHT THE SUN ROSE AND SET UPON HER NEPHEW!
I COOKED YOUR FAVORITE BREAKFAST, PETEY--WHEATCAKES!
DON'T FATTEN HIM UP TOO MUCH, DEAR! I CAN HARDLY OUT-WRESTLE HIM NOW!
THE FACULTY AT MIDTOWN HIGH WERE ALSO FOND OF THE CLEAN-CUT, HARD-WORKING HONOR STUDENT!
KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK, PARKER, AND YOU'RE SURE TO RATE A SCHOLORSHIP WHEN YOU GRADUATE!
I'LL DO MY BEST, SIR!
BUT ALAS, OTHER TEEN-AGERS CAN SOMETIMES, UNWITTINGLY, BE SO VERY CRUEL TO A SHY YOUNG MAN...
SALLY, I, EH, WAS WONDERING IF YOU'RE BUSY TONIGHT...?
PETER, FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, YOU'RE JUST NOT MY TYPE...
...NOT WHEN DREAM BOATS LIKE FLASH THOMPSON ARE AROUND!
I ADMIRE YOUR GOOD TASTE, DOLL! GET LOST, BOOKWORM!
LOOK, THERE'S A GREAT NEW EXHIBIT IN THE SCIENCE HALL TONIGHT! WOULD ANY OF YOU LIKE TO GO WITH ME?
SCIENCE HALL! HAH!
YOU STICK TO SCIENCE, SON! I'LL TAKE THE CHICKS!
YES, FOR SOME, BEING A TEEN-AGER HAS MANY HEART-BREAKING MOMENTS!
GIVE OUR REGARDS TO THE ATOM-SMASHERS, PETER!
SEE YOU AROUND, BOOKWORM!

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week to week like **Dallas** or **Dynasty**.

Now, here's something that I suggest you keep in mind.

Originally, comic books were produced for the very youngest readers. In the 1930s, when they first appeared, they were mainly reprints of various newspaper strips. However, little by little, the comic book publishers began adding original strips that were written and drawn just for the magazines. But they always assumed that comics were read by the very youngest readers. Therefore the writers were instructed to use the simplest, most basic dialogue, and told to create scripts that could be understood by the youngest members of the bubble gum brigade.

Happily, that all changed in the early '60s, and I'd like to feel that Marvel Comics was, to a large degree, responsible for that change. Today—and it's important that any new budding writers remember this—a comic book script resembles a motion picture screenplay more than anything else.

Modern comic books are now written for the general public, the same public that sees and enjoys **Star Wars**, **The Terminator**, **Rambo**, **Back to the Future** and films like that. No longer are comic book writers afraid to use words of more than one syllable. No longer must comic book writers avoid sub-plots or realistic situations.

STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF

The times that try men's souls.

Different people react differently. It's more than: "WOW! NOW WE CAN FIGHT BAD GUYS AND SAVE THE WORLD!"

MINUTES LATER, JOHNNY STORM'S FLAME SUBSIDED AND HE LANDED NEAR THE OTHER THREE! SILENTLY THEY WATCHED THE SMALL FIRE HE HAD STARTED IN THE UNDERBRUSH BURN ITSELF OUT! SILENTLY THEY WERE EACH OCCUPIED WITH THEIR OWN STARTLING THOUGHTS!
WE'VE CHANGED! ALL OF US! WE'RE MORE THAN JUST HUMAN!
LISTEN TO ME, ALL OF YOU! THAT MEANS YOU TOO, BEN! TOGETHER WE HAVE MORE POWER THAN ANY HUMANS HAVE EVER POSSESSED!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE A SPEECH, BIG SHOT! WE UNDERSTAND! WE'VE GOTTA USE THAT POWER TO HELP MANKIND, RIGHT?
RIGHT, BEN, RIGHT!
I'M CALLING MYSELF THE HUMAN TORCH! AND I'M WITH YOU ALL THE WAY!
SAME GOES FOR ME... THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
THERE'S ONLY ONE STILL MISSING... BEN!!
I AIN'T BEN ANYMORE -- I'M WHAT SUSAN CALLED ME -- THE THING!
AND I'LL CALL MYSELF... AIISTEE FANTASTIC!!
AND SO WAS BORN "THE FANTASTIC FOUR!" AND FROM THAT MOMENT ON, THE WORLD WOULD NEVER AGAIN BE THE SAME!!

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It's important that you bear this in mind. Though today's comic book scripts should be clear and understandable enough for younger readers to enjoy, they must also be intelligent, perceptive and meaningful, with the type of plots, dialogue and characterization that would interest a college student.

Okay. Now that we've establsihed the fact that comics have grown up, let's try to figure out what really makes a good comic book script. Remember, we're mainly zeroing in on superhero/fantasy stories, although most of the ground rules we'll cover will apply to virtually any type of comic book writing.

First and foremost, the most necessary ingredient is an exciting plot, a situation that will grab the reader and make him say, "Wow! This I've gotta read!" Stories today need more than the old-time formula: Bad guy commits crime. Good guy goes after him. They fight. Bad guy escapes. Good guy finds him. They fight again. Good guy wins.

Now don't get impatient. We'll discuss the type of plots we do need as we keep rolling along. Right now, we just wanna touch on the points which we'll later be examining in depth.

The next indispensible ingredient is good characterization. It's important that the characters you write about seem real, seem interesting. If a reader doesn't care about the characters, how can we expect him to care what happens to them? Therefore, everything your characters do must ring true. If you make them believable, you're half way home.

Equally vital is the element of surprise. If a reader can easily anticipate what's gonna happen, then why bother reading on? But the surprises must be legitimate, they must be logical. You can't bring in some shocking, unexpected event unless you've first managed to lay the basis for it earlier on in your story.

Another crucial factor is action. Your story must never be stagnant for too long. Both the plot and the characters must be on the go. There must always be a feeling of motion, a feeling that the reader is being propelled along by events that are moving too excitingly to stop.

Dialogue, too, is of prime importance. If your characters don't speak like real people, then your readers won't believe in them. More stories than I can count have been ruined by weak dialogue. And that goes for movies and tv shows, too.

Finally, every story must have a gripping problem. this is usually something that confronts the hero, something that makes the reader ask, "How is he ever gonna solve this?" or, "How can he ever get out of this?" The more absorbing the problem, the better your chance of hooking the reader.

There are other necessary factors as well, but we'll touch on them as we go barreling along.

Y'know, writing is an amazing thing when you think about it. Anyone who's literate can write. Anyone who can talk can write. Every time you tell someone something in conversation, you're really writing. It's just that you're doing it orally. Then what is it that makes a good writer? What makes

SURE! AND SUE COULD ALSO BE HAVIN' A DATE WITH SOME NO GOOD CRUMMY LOW-LIFE WHO'S TRYIN' TO BEAT HIM TIME!
BEN, DEAR, WHY MUST YOU ALWAYS SUSPECT THE WORST?!
BZZZZ
ZZZZZ
GASP! IT'S SUE, GOING WITH A YOU LIKE MINE. WHAT ELSE WOULD BE EXPECT?!
BUT, YOU KNOW HOW ALICIA FEELS ABOUT YOU...
SURE, I KNOW IT... N YOU KNOW IT...
BUT, HEBBIN IT AIN'T NEVER OCCURRED TO HER!
YOU'RE PROBABLY WORKING YOUR SELF UP OVER NOTHING, BIG BELLA...
YOU CAN'T EXPECT A GIRL TO SIT BY HER PHONE 24 HOURS A DAY WAITING FOR YOUR CALL!
WHY NOT? JA DON'T MEET GUYS LIKE ME EVERY DAY!
BEN, SAMMIN I GRIMM YOUSE JUST BEING OUTRAGEOUS!
MY RELIGION'S GOT NOTHIN' TO DO WITH IT!
YOU REASON WITH HIM, HONEY, I'LL CARRY THE BAGS INSIDE BY MYSELF...
BIG DEAL, WELL SEED YA TER A MEDAL IN THE MORNIN'!
BEN, IF YOU'RE PLANNIN' ON COMMANDING ABOUT ALICIA, WHY DON'T YOU DROP OVER TO HER APARTMENT?
SHE'LL PROBABLY BE HOME BY THE TIME YOU GET THERE!

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the professional writer stand out from the others?

I'm glad you asked.

The key ingredient is—style.

We've established that almost anyone can tell a story. But the thing that sets the successful writer apart is *how* he tells that story. It's the style that he uses. Style is of great importance and encompasses many elements, elements that we'll be discussing in much greater detail in our following installments.

Now that we've covered some of the elements that make a good comicbook story, let's see if we can really define what a comic book is. Hey, sure we all know the answer, but let's see how we would actually write it down. And, for the purposes of this little seminar, students, remember that we're refering to the superhero/fantasy type of comic book as exemplified primarily by Marvel Comics. Therefore, my definition would be. . .

A comic book is a publication presenting feature-length stories of bigger-than-life characters engaged in epic struggles of good versus evil. These stories are told in a series of panel illustrations, enhanced by captions and dialogue balloons.

If you have a different definition, send it in. I'll bet no two will be alike, and it might be fun to compare the various interpretations of one of America's most distinctive art forms.

And remember, though comic books bear a great resemblance to motion pictures, due to the limited number of panels per page, and due to the limited number of pages in each magazine, the stories must move still faster and the writing must be even crisper and more terse.

Well, I guess that's it for now since we've just about run out of space. So, unless Jim Shooter goes to a masquerade party as Ant Man, next issue we'll zero in on how to create characters for comic books. Now be here, huh? We'll keep working on this till we get it right!

Excelsior!

Stan

AS THE WORLD TURNS. . .

You've got personality. . .

Characters continue to grow and develope from issue to issue.

AND NOW, HAVING MET OUR FOUR AMAZING CHARACTERS, LET US RESUME OUR TALE...
I CALLED YOU TOGETHER BECAUSE I HAVE SOME PICTURES TO SHOW YOU!
PICTURES?
WHAT ARE THEY... PIN-UPS?

FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON

You see a six-month old comic book with a five or ten dollar price tag on it. You remember passing it up when it first came out for a buck or so.

And then you realize: "Why didn't I buy a dozen (or a hundred) issues of that comic? I could have made some easy money!"

There's no doubt about it. You could, and can, make a nice chunk of cash by investing in the new issues that appear every month. But make no mistake: It's not *easy* money.

Most collectors, in fact, actually *lose* money by speculating in new comics titles.

The most common mistake new comic investors and collectors make is that they simply pick a loser. That's not too hard, especially when you consider that out of the 200 odd titles that are available each month, only three or four at the most will ever show a decent return on your investment.

Predicting winners and picking hot comic book issues is a science in itself that even experienced investors and advanced collectors are still learning. Such factors as the creative team on the comic, the characters in the book, the company and even the particular format of the book must all be considered when selecting books for investments.

There are, however, five easy steps that even a beginning comic book collector can take to increase his chances of making a profit from the new issues.

STEP 1 Always buy at WHOLESALE prices.

"I am amazed how stupid some of these kids are," a comic book shop owner confides to me. "They run in here and buy three issues of a comic book from me for a dollar each. Next month they're back in here, and offering them to me for two bucks apiece. Do I look like Santa Claus? What are they thinking about?"

Most collectors who "invest" in new comics probably aren't thinking much at all, if the truth be known. They usually walk into their local comic shop, pick up a few copies of an issue they think is "hot," pay the full cover price and go home.

A more sensible approach is to decide *in advance* which specific comic books you want to invest in for the next several months. Study the upcoming releases of each company, watch how story lines are developing and be aware of artist changes.

Then place an order with a distributor or wholesaler for several issues of a book. You'll end up paying about 30 to 50 percent less than the retail price.

Buying at wholesale offers you financial protection. Even if you have to eventually sell your comics for only cover price (or slightly less), you'll still make a small profit or break even.

To buy at wholesale, you may have to eventually get a sales tax number or set yourself up as a small business. If you're going to be a serious investor, however, it's worth the trouble.

STEP 2 Always sell at RETAIL prices.

Who do most comic collectors try to sell their investments to? The retail comic book store owner or dealer. A dealer can only afford to pay you a wholesale price for your books. This is usually 50 to eighty percent less than what he can re-sell them for.

When you want to sell your new "hot" comics, sell directly to other collectors at standard retail prices. This means you will either have to advertise your books or attend local conventions.

Again, this is extra work and trouble, but remember making money is never truly "easy."

What happens time and time again is that collectors completely ignore the realities of buying and selling. They always buy at retail and end up selling at wholesale.

Let's make this important fact even more clear. If you pay $1.00 retail for a standard comic, it will have to go up in value to at *least* $4.00 retail before you could even sell it for $2.00 wholesale to a dealer and thereby double your money.

On the other hand, if you pay 50 cents wholesale (for a $1.00 comic), you could turn around next month perhaps and still sell it for its current cover price of $1.00. You double your money even though the comic itself may not have gone up in collector's value at all.

The simple truth is that it is *four* times more difficult to make money off new comics if you continue to buy them at retail and sell them at wholesale. Do it the other way around.

STEP 3 Always remember that you only make money when you SELL a comic.

Now, doesn't that seem simple? You'd be surprised, however, at how many collectors think they are making money on new comics every time they simply *buy* them.

"Yeah, I made $20.00 on the latest **Miracleman** issue. I bought twenty copies for a dollar each, and now they're selling for two bucks a pop," is a fairly typical statement by a collector.

At this point I usually ask them if they have actually *sold* any of these books for two dollars or whatever price they quote.

"Are you crazy?" they answer. "I'm going to wait and make some more money!"

For most comic collectors and investors, their entire experience is limited to *buying* comics for resale at some later and ill-defined date.

After all, it is more fun to buy than sell. Selling is hard work. Buying is easy. You just hand your money over to the many willing and appreciative takers.

So month after month, year after year, comic book investors and speculators keep "making" money on paper from books they buy but never sell.

At least every six months, you should sell a significant portion of the comics you have been buying for investment. It is a valuable educational process that will teach you more about intelligent investing than any amount of merely buying comics.

You'll quickly find out how much "real" money you'll make or lose. You'll learn from mistakes, and you'll discover the best ways to get the most money back from your investments.

If you buy a *thousand* times during your collecting career, but only sell *once* at the end, guess what you'll be? A very good buyer and a lousy seller.

Buyers spend money, sellers make money. I rest my case.

STEP 4 Act and think like a DEALER, not a COLLECTOR.

The people who make the most money in comic book investments are the dealers. They make their money off collectors.

If you continue to think of yourself as a "collector/investor" instead of a "dealer/seller," you'll fall into several traps.

First, investing is a business, not a hobby. To a dealer, a comic book is a commodity. He buys comics that he may or may not like or enjoy, but that will sell. He buys dozens or hundreds of copies of a single issue for resale—not the one or two or three copies a collector might purchase.

The dealer buys for tastes in the marketplace, and not on personal preference. He is not attached to his books. He wants to turn them over quickly for a moderate profit, and then reinvest immediately.

Too many casual speculators simply buy multiple issues of a comic book they happen to like. They may overprice books they themselves enjoy when it's time to sell.

They usually spread their limited investment capital all around the new issues, and end up buying two or three copies of many titles instead of a hundred issues of one truly strong book.

If you want to seriously invest in comics, you can still be a collector. (In fact, I might argue that unless you have a collector's background and knowledge, you have no business speculating in comics anyway.)

The trick is to separate your collector's interests and collection from your business interest and investment stock.

Keep track of the money you spend for investments, and the money you receive back from them. Keep records and books like a dealer and retailer. Engage in the business practices a good dealer must follow. Take your investments seriously. You will be rewarded!

STEP 5 ENJOY what you are doing!

Let's face it. Comic book collecting is a unique and crazy kind of experience. Even when you're serious about making money on new issues, you had better be enjoying it.

Why?

Because even if you don't make a killing, you will not have wasted your time and money if you also receive some pleasure and fun in the attempt.

If all you see are dollar signs (and this applies to dealers as well!), I would suggest that you investigate more conventional and safer investment and retail avenues.

Sure, the thrill of making money from new issues is exhilarating—but so is just being able to *read* and enjoy your latest favorite comic book!

So invest wisely but enjoy, and may your dividends be both fun and profitable.

Pelleas and Melisande by P. Craig from ECLIPSE.

COLLECTOR PROFILE

To take a break from the investment aspects of comics, this column will sporadically feature insights into various comic collectors' habits, likes and approaches to collecting. In other words, we'll see how other people are having *fun* with this great hobby.

Richard P. Griffith of New York talked with me about why he collects comics, and his approach to assembling a unique collection:

"About ten years ago, I picked up Maurice Horn's **The World Encyclopedia of Comics** and decided that I would collect representative samples of each American artist described in the book.

"I am now in the process of inventorying and indexing a collection of secondary source material pertaining to sequential comic art and artists. My collection is housed in self-constructed large loose-leaf volumes which contain collected biographies, bibliographies, interviews, critiques and reviews from fanzines, newspapers, books and the comic books about and by the artists.

"The materials are arranged alphabetically by artist name, and complemented by prints, collections and some original art examples of each artist's work. I've tried to reduce all the materials down to 9 by 12 inch pages for my volumes. In some cases, I include either representative newspaper strips or comic book pages done by the artist.

"I see my collection as a personal comendium of American comic book and strip artists.

"Now 25 volumes later, I'm still discovering unique worlds filled with wonderful characters doing daring things that were part of someone's imagination.

"I'm glad I didn't limit myself to any particular artist, or subject, or format, but came in with an open mind that allowed me to discover people I didn't even know existed!"

Wise man, wise words.

2000 A.D. from Eagle Comics

The Rocketeer by Dave Stevens

HOT TIPS

Instead of individual "buy" recommendations, this edition of *HOT TIPS* will be an overview of the investment potential of the "alternative" comic book market.

Alternative comics are defined here as any books *not* published by Marvel, D.C. or any of the other long-established and conventionally distributed comic book publishers (such as Archie comics, etc.). Specifically, this would put Eclipse, First Comics, Comico and others in the spotlight.

Are "alternative" comics good investments?

Yes. No. And Maybe. Here's what I mean:

When you are evaluating the investment potential of any collectible comic, you should first look for parallels and past performances by similar books

Alternative comics are a relatively recent phenomenon, however, with a five-year history at best. The closest thing to them in the past were the underground comix of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Both alternative and underground comics were and are produced in quantities of 10,000 to 30,000 copies—about one tenth or less the print run of a major company's books.

Both alternatives and undergrounds are distributed to a limited market through specialized distribution channels which often do not service mundane commercial accounts.

Both are designed and produced for very limited and well-defined audiences (i.e., the undergrounds were primarily for members of the youth counterculture who visited "headshops," and the alternatives are for hardcore comic fans who frequent specialty comic book shops).

Now you would think that with a low print run and limited distribution that both alternatives and undergrounds would be prime candidates for limited, collectible status.

Actually, the opposite occurs.

With such small circulations, the undergrounds and the alternatives cannot build the large collector base and fan familiarity that is necessary to support an active back issue market.

Think about it. Ten years from now, the average comic collector will probably not be able to even name the more popular titles and characters that are now appearing in today's alternative comics. But you can be darn sure that he will know about Spiderman, Superman, Batman and the other major Marvel/DC characters.

What will probably occur with the alternatives is exactly the same thing that has happened with the back issue underground market. You will have a small but dedicated group of cultists who actively seek out these limited edition comics, but very little across-the-board collector interest in these "curiosities."

Now please do not interpret these observations as being anti-alternative comics. I believe that some very fine work is being produced every month from these publishers, and that they are performing an admirable service for today's comic reader.

It's just that I am not at all encouraged by the future strengths of these books in the back issue marketplace five years from now. And if you are thinking about seriously investing in (and not just reading) comics, you have to take the long-term view.

Until the alternative comics stand "head-and-shoulders" above the conventional offerings of the major companies, until they develop a nationally recognized character or property and until they receive wider distribution and readership—then they will remain in the same category as the underground comics in terms of potential investment items.

Please, however, continue to collect, support and read worthwhile alternative comic titles. And remember: way back in 1962, the first comic company to emerge as a serious "alternative" to DC Comics was a small outfit run by Stan Lee called Marvel.

So you see guys, it's all an educated guess. Don't be afraid to jump into alternative comics for investment items—but do look before you leap.

CF

MIKE BENTON is the author of *Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit* (Crown Publishers, $8.95). Now available at your local bookstore or comic book specialty shop.

SILVER AGE

BY WILL JACOBS & GERARD JONES

PART II

In a burst of inspiration in 1965, Schiff and his writers created five more strange and colorful, albeit short-lived, new heroes. The most interesting was Immortal Man, gifted with the ability to die and return to life again and again, always remembering his last life but each time in a different body. With art by Jack Sparling and an odd undercurrent provided by Immortal Man's undying love for a normal woman, the series made sporadic but memorable appearances in **Strange Adventures**. The same title occasionally featured Animal Man, a hero capable of taking on the abilities of any animal which came near him, whose main attraction was some suberb art by Carmine Infantino and Gil Kane. **Mystery In Space** starred Ultra, the Multi-Allen, a quatripartite crimefighter—his right arm had super strength, his left magnetic powers, his left leg could hurl lightning bolts and his right enabled him to fly—with art by Lee Elias. Less interesting were Prince Ra-Man, a telepath who fought occultish menaces in **House of Secrets**, and Automan, an amiable robot similar to the Doom Patrol's mechanical member, whose tongue-in-cheek adventures popped up in **Tales of the Unexpected**.

More successful was "Dial H for Hero," which Schiff and writer Dave Wood created as a wide-open forum to experiment with strange heroes. Oriented mainly toward younger readers, it was the most unrestrained of all the new series. Advertised on his first cover as "The Most Original Character in Comic History," Robby Reed is a teenager who stumbles across a strange device from another world, resembling a telephone dial. Whenever he dials the letters H-E-R-O he is transformed into a different superhero, but never the same one twice and never with powers that Robby might expect. The Constant challenge to Robby is to find a way to use his unexpected powers to cope with whatever crisis is at hand (**House of Mystery** 156, Jan. 1966).

Nearly every Robby Reed story featured three new heroes in its fifteen pages, which made it a very busy and colorful series indeed. Radar-Sonar Man, Velocity Kid, Baron Buzz-Saw, Quakemaster—the heroes were as numerous as they were outlandish. When Robby did become only two heroes it was usually because some criminal had swiped his alien device to "Dial V for Villain" (HM 158, Apr. 1966) or because a nosey female classmate monkeyed with the dial to become a heroine (HM 169, Sept. 1967). The stories had little to offer but action and color, but they were written with humor and verve, and epitomized the spirit of unrestrained invention that ran rampant in comic's boom years. They also featured Jim Mooney's best artwork, full of energy, fun, and clever hero designs, displaying a much greater freedom of imagination than his Supergirl work.

Dial H proved to be Schiff's last creation for comics. He has said that all the shifting of editorial stables "was

DC'S STRANGEST HEROES

NEW Adventures of 2 New SUPER-HEROES!
STRANGE ADVENTURES
IMMORTAL MAN
HERO WHO LIVES AND DIED 100 TIMES!
A-MAN-- THE HERO WITH ANIMAL POWERS!
GREATEST ADVENTURE
YOU'RE TOO LATE, AUTOMATON -- ANOTHER SECOND YOUR ALLY NEGATIVE-MAN WOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED! UNABLE TO RETURN TO ITS HUMAN BODY!
REBORN OUT OF DISASTER FOUR NEW VOIDS ROSE AGAIN TO FORM A LEGION OF THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES!
A FULL LENGTH COMICS THRILL YOU'LL NEVER FORGET!
THE INFERIOR five
DISASTER! CRIME!
MERMYMAID

© 1965 D.C Comics

preparatory to my decision to retire," which he had been considering since the battles over the monster craze. He tried for some years to persuade DC to establish an educational office, so that the powerful comics medium could be used to inform and enlighten children, but he was denied. And now, another new craze was becoming steadily more insistent at DC: The self-parodying, intentional corniness known as "camp." For a variety of reasons, Schiff retired in 1967 to devote himself to political activity and philosophical writings, his titles being divided among Kashdan, Boltinoff and neophyte editor Jack Miller.

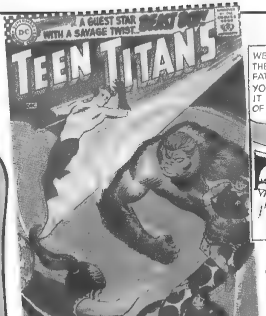
The growing tendency of the weird heroes to turn into self-parody began to show itself in Kashdan's sole entry, **Metamorpho the Element Man**. After Rex Mason is subjected to a freak chemical accident, he finds himself able to change not only his form but his very substance, turning any part of his body independently into any element of the periodic table (**Brave and Bold** 57, Jan. 1965). Copper legs, bromium body, hands of cobalt and magnesium—he was like a kid's junior chemistry set come to life. He was also a multi-colored, hideous-looking composite creature who shifted to the most bizarre extremes of shape at every opportunity. With such a weird hero, the series could only play upon that weirdness with a rollicking self-mockery that succeeded there as it couldn't have in a more conventional series. Wisecracking like a tough guy in a bad Sixties crime movie, the "Fab Freak" breezed through tangles with power-mad scientists, goofy-looking aliens and sub-atomic universes effortlessly, but was unable to cope with a pair of rival girlfriends: Urania the E-Girl, who shared the hero's element power, and Sapphire Stagg, armed with her own "curve power" and a great deal of money. Bob Haney wrote the series with purposely comball humor, and Sal Trapani drew it (often well-inked by Ramona Fradon) with tongue-in-cheek grotesqueness.

The new trend picked up momentum in Murray Boltinoff's line, as the adventures of the Doom Patrol began stepping over the fine line between bizarre and the ludicrous. The seeds were planted with a villain called the Animal-Vegetable-Mineral Menace, whose ability for transformation knew no reasonable bounds (DP 89, Aug. 1964). Soon there followed a new cast-member named Mento, a millionaire possessing a silly-looking purple hat that gave him undefined mental powers (DP 91, Nov. 1964). But the clincher came when the DP were attacked by a giant juke-box (DP 96, June 1965); the freakish quality of the series had turned to self-parody.

Boltinoff had a unique editorial perspective which probably contributed to this change in tone, for in addition to being Schiff's associate he served as editor of such outright humor comics as **The Adventures of Jerry Lewis**. While this per-

SILVER AGE

AFTER THE STORM SUBSIDES..
WELL, HOMER'S GONE INTO HIDING. NOW MAYBE EEL O'BRIAN CAN FIND WHAT PLASTIC MAN COULDN'T ABOUT FATSO!
SO YOU WANT PROOF OF MY ABILITY, EH?..OKAY, SMART STUFF. I'LL MEET YOU HERE IN TWO WEEKS, AND KEEP AN EYE ON THE PAPERS,'CAUSE YOU'LL BE READING A LOT ABOUT ME!



WE GOT THE PAINT FAT CAT/ YOU MIXED IT KIND OF THICK.'
IT'S GOTTA BE THICK TO BE SEEN BY THOSE CATS ON PARK AVENUE AND IT'S GOTTA BE GREE .. THAT'S A COLOR THEY RECOGNIZE...THE COLOR OF MONEY!

THE TEEN TITANS–

© 1966 D.C. Comics

spective had probably helped him avoid superhero cliches in the DP's early adventures, now it seemed to be preventing him from taking them seriously. A wacky teen hero called Beast-Boy was soon added (DP 99, Nov. 1965), and wooden humor replaced the earlier, character-delineating dialogue.

A comparable change was effected on **Challengers**, where, by 1966, tough Rocky Davis had become a hipster, spouting nothing but lines like, "Drop him, cat—I mean like make with the splitsville!" They began battling characters such as Vilio, "the world's wickedest villain. . . the master of monumental meanness" (CU 52, Nov. 1966). And the artists on both strips, Bob Brown and Bruno Premiani, unable to draw humorously, simply let their work grow rougher and sloppier.

The trend reached its greatest extreme when the **Batman** tv show became a craze in 1966 and DC tried to keep up with its self-conscious humor. The greatest victim was **Blackhawk**, which continued its decade-long decline until desperate measures were taken. As Batman himself put it in a guest appearance in issue 228 (Jan. 1967), "The Blackhawks are washed-up has-beens, out-of-date antiques. . . To put it bluntly, they just don't swing!" To reverse the steady fall of sales, editor Kashdan's solution was to make superheroes of them. No longer would they be Andre, Olaf, Stan, Hendrickson, et al, but Weapons Master, Golden Centurion, the Leaper and M'sieu Machine (BH 230, Mar. 1967). For the Blackhawks, this overhauling into a way-out super-strip was the last and worst in a series of unsuccessful measures; they were finally cancelled after 243 issues (Nov. 1968).

1966 saw the creation of two superhero-humor comics. Jack Miller's **Inferior Five** concerned a bumbling squad of

The first time around they weren't nearly as popular but they were sure a lot stranger!

© 1985 D.C. Comics

crimefighters with names such as Dumb Bunny and Awkwardman. Boltinoff's **Plastic Man** was a revamping of the zany Golden Age ancestor of both the Elongated Man and Mr. Fantastic; but the concept needed the comic brilliance of its creator, cartoonist Jack Cole, and the lackluster pencils of Win Mortimer did not do the trick. Neither series was much of a success.

Closely tied to the camp craze at DC was a loudly-touted "teen" orientation that affected humor, romance and superhero comics. The one superhero title conceived mainly in that spirit was **The Teen Titans**, composed entirely of kid sidekicks—Robin, Kid Flash, Aqualad and Wonder Girl—which grew out of a team-up in **Brave and Bold** (BB 54, July 1964) and started in its own comic with the February, 1966 issue. Edited by Kashdan, written by Haney, and drawn most often by Irv Novick (with the inappropriate inks of Nick Cardy), it started as rather standard adventure but quickly became a vehicle for endless pop-culture references and cute slang that could have seemed convincing only to very young kids. In Issue 12 (Dec. 1967), for example, the "Fab Foursome" meet the "frabjous D.J. Deejay . . . the world's first disc jockey in space," whose "dreamy sounds" send "Wonder Chick, Gillhead, Flashroo and Robin-O" off on an implausible battle with an alien that is described by Deejay as "groovy! So gear and ungrotty! Marv and fab!" The Titans won a regular following (many of whom debated in the letters pages whether the Titans were better than the Beatles. . . although without specifying at *what*), but they were left entirely at the mercy of momentary fads.

Kashdan also launched **Bomba the Jungle Boy**, loosely based on Roy Rockwood's old adventure series about a teenaged version of Tarzan (BJB 1, Oct. 1967). Although Jack Sparling contributed some robust, attractive art, the plots and dialogue were weighed down by cute youth concerns.

It was Murray Boltinoff who, in 1967, began pulling the stable's comics out of their campiness. The Doom Patrol were restored to their darker, more disturbing orientation, and although art and story both suffered in quality, their adventures were again unique and engrossing. But sales had fallen fatally low, and cancellation came in 1968. At the last, Boltinoff, Drak and Premiani redeemed their series with a final issue as unconventional and disturbing as the strip's beginning. The Brotherhood of Evil lure our heroes to a desert island and try to break their wills by offering them a deal: They will be allowed to live if they will approve the murder of four-teen innocent, ordinary, "useless" people. But the Doom Patrol will not submit, and the Brotherhood torpedoes the island, killing them all (DP 121, Oct. 1968). In the end, it is fitting that the "freaks" who survived to lead a second life, the "world's strangest heroes," should be the first heroes actually to die on the comic book page.

The weird heroes of Schiff, Boltinoff and Kashdan helped DC learn to innovate and added greatly to the color and variety of the Silver Age, but all essentially remained on a side-track of the comics world. Beginning in 1967, however, one of their direct descendants would change the course of comic book history. CF

SERIALIZED FROM THE COMIC BOOK HEROES. *JACOBS & JONES ARE FREQUENT CONTRIBUTORS TO* NATIONAL LAMPOON.

STRIP SEARCH

RON GOULART

"YOU CAN CALL ME DEXTER— IT'S NOT MY NAME BUT IT'LL DO."

Nicholas Afonsky assumed the drawing chores on **Secret Agent X-9** in 1938. A White Russian and a graduate of the University of Moscow, Afonsky had been a much-decorated soldier in World War I and then a practicing criminal lawyer. Came the revolution and he fled his native land, winding up in the United States in the early 1920s. After doing a variety of magazine and newspaper work, he became Ed Wheelan's assistant on **Minute Movies**. He was lured to King Features in 1933—part of, Wheelan always believed, a Hearst conspiracy to sabotage his strip—and given the job of drawing the **Little Annie Rooney** Sunday page.

Afonsky patterned X-9 himself on the previous Flanders' version, but all the other characters were drawn in his flowery, semi-straight version of the Wheelan style. Years of depicting the putupon orphan Annie Rooney, wicked stepmothers, kindly old codgers and smart dogs seems to have affected Afonsky—possibly even giving him a bad case of Annie Rooney's favorite disease, the wimwams—and his X-9 had a hammy, tearjerker look.

The plotlines and dialogue during Afonsky's tenure are equally sappy, leading you to suspect that Brandon Walsh, friend of Will Gould and the sentimental gentleman whose scripts kept Annie Rooney up to her neck in soap suds over the years, may've taken a turn behind the Robert Storm pen-name. In a typical sequence X-9 is pitted against the Black Widow—"under suspicion for crimes in all countries." The slinky lady first encounters the G-Man in a posh restaurant where he's lunching with J. Edgar Hoover. She is quite taken with him. "Following X-9's exit were the tender eyes of a woman . . . soft, limpid and yearning . . . and an expression from an almost forgotten past before Madam Noir became 'The Black Widow.'" Later the two dine and exchange lines frought with veiled meanings—

BLACK WIDOW: I can imagine you just as glibly telling women how much you love them.

X-9: I never told anyone I loved them, without meaning it.

Quite a change from the hardboiled Hammett days.

Afonsky's version was not a hit and he was removed from the feature after seven months. The syndicate had other teams warming up. A week or two of samples of **Secret Agent X-9**, written by Brick Bradford's co-creator William Ritt and drawn by bullpen regular Joe King, were prepared about this time. For some reason they didn't get the nod and the next artist on the strip was Austin Briggs. Afonsky stayed with the **Little Annie Rooney** Sunday until his death in 1943.

Briggs was still working as Alex Raymond's assistant when he went into the G-Man business. I interviewed him in the late 1960s and he said then he no longer remembered when he'd started working with Raymond. He was certain, though, he'd been with him early enough to assist on **X-9** as well as **Flash Gordon**. If this is so, then the almost two years he now spent with **Secret Agent X-9** marked his second stint on the feature. More restless as an artist than Raymond, he developed a different approach and moved away from the drybrush pulp look to a more sophisticated slick magazine approach. His compositions, which included down shots and tilted angle shots, were much more imaginative than anything that had shown up in the strip before. Briggs, who later drew both the daily and Sunday **Flash Gordon**, never signed his name to any strip but **X-9**.

Briggs' X-9 looked pretty much like Raymond's, although a bit less heroic in stature and more inclined to let his suits get rumpled. X-9's sidekick, carried over from the Afonsky version, was a fellow FBI agent known as Wild Bill. The continuities, most likely written by Trell, swung from the prosaic to the highly improbable. X-9 had to deal with a spy ring, with a lady whose gang hijacked helium and sold it to foreign dirigibles and a villain named Dr. Stix who planned to sabotage the Panama Canal. Despite all the wild events, the

SECRET AGENT X-9 Part II

AS SOON AS YOU ROUND THE NEXT CORNER, SLOW DOWN--! WANT TO JUMP OFF!
MOVIE STARS GET PAID FOR DOING LESS THAN THIS!
WE'RE GAINING ON HIM--IS HE WRONG?... NO, I DON'T THINK SO!
THE HUNCH-BACH AND SOME GANGSTERS THINK THEY ARE PURSUING X-9
WHAT'S HAPPENED? WE HEARD SHOOTING
HAMMILL AND THE OTHERS ARE CHASING BERGHER--YOU'D BETTER GO AFTER HIM, TOO
GET HIM--DEAD OR ALIVE!
WE'LL BRING YE BACH HIS BLASTED HIDE!
WITH NEARLY ALL THE GANG AWAY FROM THE BHACH, X-9 TAKES A CHANCE

ALEX RAYMOND & DASHIELL HAMMETT'S ORIGINAL X-9

tone of the strip became less melodramatic and there was somewhat more emphasis on character. In 1940 Briggs was assigned the new **Flash Gordon** daily and Mel Graff began his long association with **X-9**.

Graff took over with the release of May 13, 1940 in the middle of a sequence and after a week of strips by the King bullpen. Graff had been in New York with the Associated Press syndicate since the early 1930s. He was doing **The Adventures of Patsy** for AP when "Ward Greene, at King, both phoned and wired me" to carry on with **X-9**. Trell continued to provide the scripts for a time. Graff once told me he felt Trell "was doing a shoddy job on the story," and he eventually persuaded the syndicate to let him take over the writing himself. It was Graff who made X-9 somewhat more human. "You were supposed to love him because he wore a badge and carried a gun. He never fell in love," Graff explained in the middle 1940s. "I'm changing all that . . . Also, I've finally given the guy a name. After all, an agent who is supposed to be secret doesn't have everybody yelling 'X-9' at him. And so he will be known as Phil Corrigan from hence on." Graff had long been fond of this sort of name for a hero—Patsy's dashing uncle was named Phil Corrigan. X-9's love life did improve, to the point where he finally married and fathered a child.

Under Mel Graff the strip swung even further from the Raymond look. Graff, having worked with both Milton Caniff and Noel Sickles at AP, had developed his own individual version of their style. Graff had done some impressive work on **Patsy** and his first few years on X-9 were equally effective. He favored, like his Florida neighbors Roy Crane and Leslie Turner, the use of doubletone board. His staging of action was good, his design sense strong. He was also effective at depicting static stretches of continuity, such as office conversations, restaurant confrontations and so forth. Graff had worked for years as a caricaturist as well and you'll notice that his secondary characters and his villains are not stock types but come across as varied and different as real people.

The lady Phil Corrigan finally married, by the way, first appeared in the strip late in 1944. Her name was Wilda Dorray and she was, appropriately enough, a mystery novelist.

Mel Graff is one of those artists who never managed to generate the attention his work deserved and he has been pretty much ignored by comics historians in the ten years since his death. Part of this is because he worked on strips that were not in the top ten, and therefore not as widely circulated, and part has to be because of the man himself. His best work was done in the 1930s and 1940s and from then on

PHIL CORRIGAN OR SECRET AGENT X-9 —THE STRIP ALWAYS FASCINATES—

there is a sharp and noticeable decline. Graff suffered from a serious drinking problem for many years and it resulted in his alienating many people and turning in less than first-rate stuff.

I interviewed him by letter, by phone and in person and found him capable of being everything from cordial to rude. He was a big, gruff man and he seemed to have mixed feelings about anyone who expressed admiration for his accomplishments as an artist. What little attention has been paid to him since his death has been negative. **The World Encyclopedia of Comics** attacks him for betraying "the spirit of the strip" and for "emasculating" X-9. How you emasculate someone by allowing him to carry on romances, get married and have kids is not gone into. What Graff is really being criticized for is not being Alex Raymond. This is certainly so and during Graff's best year on the strip, in the 1940s, he did a better job with the character than the young Raymond had.

Graff got rid of the hokum and the ignorance about police procedures that had built up. He made the strip more realistic, tried to deal with the sort of cases the FBI would really handle and made his characters' personal problems part of the story. Graff, of course, also had a fondness for downbeat plots, one that mixed romance and sleaziness. The same sort of stories to be found in the movies of the 1940s that critics now label *film noir*—**Out of the Past, Phantom Lady, Scarlet Street,** etc.

It's likely that the **X-9** strip never did as well as Graff had hoped. By 1945, in a special drawing done for a Sigman Chi salute to Caniff, Graff could describe himself as "your stalemated old cellmate." He stayed with X-9 until early in 1960. He later explained that he left because "the cops and robbers theme had grown tiresome," but it's likely King Features suggested he retire.

X-9's appearance had changed, briefly, in November of 1942. For seven weeks he somewhat resembled Jay Garrick, better known to comic book readers of the day as the Flash. E.E. Hibbard, who'd been drawing the adventures of the Fastest Man Alive since 1940, came in and ghosted a sequence entitled "The Oil Heiress Kidnapping." In constrast to the European settings Graff had been using of late, this one took place in urban and domestic locales and featured a villain with a highly improbable, though apparently real, beard. Hibbard, whose major influences were Sickles and Caniff, did a creditable job of substituting for Graff. This was the only time in his career that he had anything to do with a newspaper strip.

Another artist who worked on X-9, also secretly, was Paul Norris. "In April, 1943 I joined King Features to draw **Secret Agent X-9**," he once told me. "I only drew the strip from April through August. From September '43 until January '46 I was in the Army." Norris went back to work for King after leaving the service, filling in on a variety of features. "In the later part of '48 I started ghosting X-9. I produced the whole thing, story and art. I would do two ten-week continuities a year. . . until Bob Lubbers took over the strip."

Lubbers, a veteran comic book artist and Good Girl Art expert, was already drawing **Long Sam** for United Features Syndicate. One of the fastest men in the business, he took on the penname Bob Lewis and added the six X-9 dailies to his weekly workload. His X-9 was a handsomer fellow, with curly movie star hair. Lubbers' Corrigan also went in for sport-coats and slacks rather than sincere business suits. Not surprisingly there were plenty of attractive women to be seen. The stories were pretty much the mixture as before, though less downbeat than those of Graff. When Lubbers quit in 1967, the strip returned to a 1950s equivalent of its original Alex Raymond look.

Al Williamson had long been one of the chief followers of Raymond. He began working in comic books while still in his teens and went on to draw for EC, the American Comics Group, Harvey, etc. For the shortlived King line of comic books he did **Flash Gordon** and, as a filler, an X-9 episode. The syndicate was impressed and offered Williamson, and his scriptwriter Archie Goodwin, the newspaper strip. Rechristened **Secret Agent Corrigan**, the first Williamson-Goodwin daily ran on January 20, 1967. Espionage and government spying had changed considerably, both in real life and in the entertainment media, since X-9's advent and the new version of the strip took this into account. Goodwin has told me that he was more influenced by James Bond than by what his predecessors had done. Foreign locales became a regular thing, the weaponry grew ever more complex and many of the villains were, to say the least, larger-than-life.

Corrigan has not been one of the top money makers and that's one of the reasons Williamson and Goodwin gave the strip up in the early 1980s. Williamson's low opinion of feature syndicates—"The syndicates are a bunch of morons, most of them. I'd like to kick them around the block two or three times."—may also have had something to do with his departure. George Evans, EC veteran and all around excellent illustrator, took over the drawing and the writing. His X-9 is a variation of Williamson's though a bit more hardbitten and worldweary.

Given the resiliency of Phil Corrigan, it's possible he'll have a few more faces before he finally hangs up his gun.

CF

Ron Goulart has had over 140 of his books published, winning awards for his mysteries, science fiction and westerns.

COMICS FEATURE

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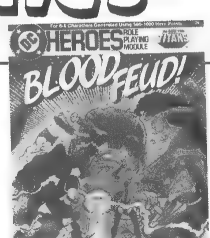

BY STEVE PERRIN

A NEW DC HEROES MODULE

REVIEWED ON PAGE AFTER NEXT

I may be admitting heresy, but I don't watch **60 Minutes**. I'm one of those strange people who really mean it when they say, "I only watch Public tv." Thus, when I went to work a while back with nothing much on my mind but wondering where the rent was coming from, I was amazed when one of my bosses greeted me with "well, killed any children lately?"

I didn't make the immediate mental jump to realize that Peter was talking about Mike Wallace's latest pseudo-expose—the supposed direct connection between **Dungeons & Dragons** and the current teen suicide rate.

Need I say that I consider this to be so much horse droppings? I'm pretty sure that my boss thinks so too. At least, **Comics and Comix** continues to sell games and I continue to write them. But this kind of wowserism bothers me.

It all started a few years back when a young child genius going to a university in the Great Lakes area (home of **D&D**) suddenly disappeared. Hearing that the young man was a D&D afficianado, the police searched the steam tunnels under the university. The word got out that role-players had used this underground warren for "life-sized" games. Rumors abounded that the poor lad had been sacrificed in a D&D ritual, or had been killed by a friend who thought he was an orc, or something equally bizarre.

In fact, the boy had lots of problems that had to do with being a bit younger than his classmates, and discovering his homosexuality and hating his deteriorating home situation. Nothing to do with his choice of intellectual recreation. He had run away with his boyfriend and was eventually found in Texas by a private detective hired by his affluent parents. He killed himself some months later.

One lesson of this event is that there is no such thing as *bad* publicity. **Dungeons and Dragons**, which had been a small-time game with a steadily growing customer base, suddenly grew sky-high. The world learned about "D&D," and kids all over the country finally had some idea what all those "nerds in study hall" were doing with those books and dice and paper.

D&D's publisher, TSR Inc., hated the type of publicity they had gained, but had no quarrel with the economic result. Notoriety is attention, and attention paid off in consumer dollars. TSR became a million-dollar corporation almost overnight.

Since then, D&D and TSR have been the targets for a long series of attacks. A game of magic and fantasy featuring fantastic and magical creatures, there is at least mention of demons and devils. Fundamentalist preachers say it teaches Satanism.

One Arizona tv evangelist issued a cassette tape advertised on handbills posted at colleges all over the country. On the tape, he told the story of a poor mother who feared what the **D&D** books were doing to her child, so she burned them. According to the distraught mother, the books screamed as they burned.

The evangelist also expressed concern that children who play these games—he even had the courtesy to mention my game, **RuneQuest**, which is usually ignored by others who prefer the monolithic TSR as a target—aren't watching television any more! I'm sure his concern was that they weren't watching *him* on tv, but I, for one, am all for anything which gets the kids away from the tube! I consider the many hours I spent glued to the tube as a child to have been totally wasted. (However, I still remember the words to the theme songs for **Cheyenne**, **Maverick**, **Bronco** and **Sugarfoot**!)

So am I saying that players cannot get too involved with their games? No. Any player runs the risk of becoming so obsessed with their games that they don't concentrate on their jobs or schoolwork, ignore their non-gaming friends, spouses and parents and see the world in terms of rolled characteristics. However, these are passing fancies, and no more a lasting problem than seeing the world as an endless series of football games. Perhaps closer to home, it is no more enduring a calamity than thinking that maybe there are mutants out there, or seeing the real world as another part of the DC Multiverse.

In short, gamers of any age are hobbyists. Some can let their hobby overwhelm them, just as they can let making the football team or earning straight "A"s or getting a date for the prom overwhelm them. This tendency to go overboard is part of the reason for the undeniably high teenage suicide rate. However, **60 Minutes** and company are making D&D "a scapegoat for the rampant teenage suicide problem," as TSR spokesman Dieter Sturm said in a recent **Newsweek** article.

In fact, my former boss, Greg Stafford of Chaosium, pointed out that **60 Minutes** stated that there were 24 deaths attributed to causes stemming from D&D involvement. However, there have been over eight million copies of the D&D books and boxes sold, not to mention other role-playing games such as **RuneQuest**.

Greg also pointed out that "The same people are trying to ban role-playing games like D&D in the 80s that tried to ban rock and roll in the 50s, comic books in the 40s and evolution in the 20s. I expect them to have the same success now."

I hope he's right. But none of these battles are over as I write this. Proponents of rock and roll, comic books and evolution have all suffered setbacks, though they still have the upper hand. Let's hope that role-playing games have the same success.

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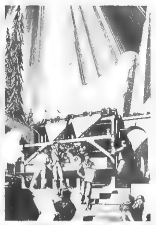
Recent years have seen an increasing interest in original artwork created for the fields of comic art and illustration. Despite this growing importance, there has yet to be the definitive, landmark sale tracing the true history of these forms of art. Until now. Guernsey's —the auction gallery noted for conducting large and unusual sales such as the S.S. United States, Circus World, Film Posters and The History of Transportation—is pleased to present an enormous 2-day mostly unreserved auction featuring the largest collection of historic and significant examples of comic art and fine illustration ever to appear.

COMIC ART The list of hundreds of important original cartoons and comics is staggering. A brief sampling includes. 3 original Yellow Kids incl a 1896 color painting by Outcault, perhaps the most famous daily strip ever printed. The burial of Raven Sherman from Terry and the Pirates by Caniff, rare comic book art, incl first appearance of the Joker (Batman) and Lou Fine Golden Age covers, rare comic originals of Charlie Chan, Red Barry, Polly and her Pals, Joe Palooka; major grouping of early Rube Goldbergs, Lyonel Feininger scarce original strip of Wee Willie Winkie by famed German Expressionist, important originals of Pogo (Walt Kelly memorabilia plus second daily strip), Prince Valiant, Dick Tracy, Buster Brown, Little Nemo, 1st issue full run of Spirit, Frazetta EC story art, early Barney Google and Wash Tubbs originals, rare runs of vintage comic



sections and proof sheets Yellow Kid, Little Nemo, Krazy Kat, Prince Valiant (virtually complete run of 2,000 pages) The animation section will include an extraordinary grouping of rare art from Disney, Iwerks, Lantz, Warners MGM and other studios. Of note is the important painting " 'Tis the Season" by famed Disney artist Carl Barks.

NEW YORKER & POLITICAL CARTOONS A large sampling of original works, featuring from The New Yorker 'stable" Arno, Addams, Thurber, Steinberg, Darrow Jr., Held Jr., Hokinson, Koren, Barsotti, Opie, Price, Searle, Shermond, Soglow, Steig, Taylor, Tobey, Williams and others Political cartoon originals by Thomas Nast, Kirby, Oliphant, MacNelly, Fischetti, D Smith, W Mullin and more It should be noted that two fine subsections of the sale include significant numbers of early works by women cartoonists and a rich variety of work on Black subjects

ILLUSTRATION The original illustration portion of the sale—comprised of many hundreds of works—features a staggering cross-section of the finest artists who have ever worked in the field A brief list includes perhaps the most significant grouping of J.C Leyendecker oils ever to appear at one sale, Norman Rockwell, Rockwell Kent, C.D Gibson, J.M Flagg, H.C Christy (including a magnificent three panel two sided oil painted screen), H Dunn, H Pyle, Mead Schaeffer, N.C Wyeth; W.B Humphrey, R. Barton, H Brett, D Crockwell, F McCarthy, H.E. Smith, J.W Smith, N Eggenhoffer, N Price, A Becher, and many others from every period of illustrating history Also included are children's book illustrations by Harrison Cady and Johnny Gruelle. Of a unique nature are illustrated full-size billboards, one by Norman Rockwell

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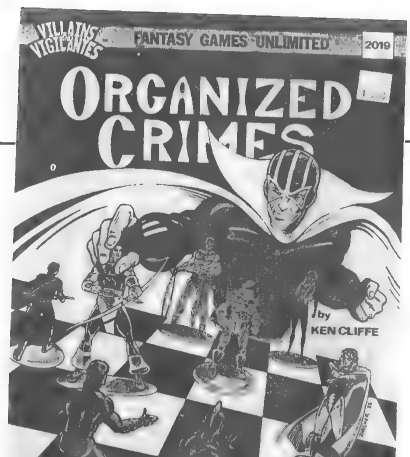

BLOOD FEUD

Mayfair Games of Chicago (actually Niles, Illinois, now; they moved to larger quarters in the suburbs) has released the second module for their licensed DC **Heroes** role-playing game. It's called **Blood Feud** and deals with good ol' Brother Blood, everyone's favorite New Teen Titans villain. The scenario is actually about the Brotherhood of Evil, led by the literally disembodied Brain, with support from Monsieur Mallah, Phobia, Plasmus, Warp and Houngan. The Brotherhood has decided to assassinate Brother Blood on the latter's visit to New York. The Titans draw the assignment of protecting someone they hate more than any of their other enemies.

This scenario is more of a role-playing challenge than the earlier **Siege**. In the latter module, the player's only had to act like heroes—its not polite to turn a supervillain into a thin pink smear on the ferro-concrete—and use their Justice League of America character's powers properly. In **Blood Feud**, the fun is in playing Nightwing (who was once brainwashed by Brother Blood into almost killing his friends), Cyborg (whose old girlfriend was killed by Blood's minions) and Changling (who was once aided by the Brotherhood in hunting down and killing the person who killed his old team, the Doom Patrol).

The original game provides statistics for the New Teen Titans and Brother Blood, but this one adds stats for Kole (who does not survive the Crisis, so this scenario must be "pre-Crisis") and the Brotherhood of Evil.

The plot revolves around the assassination attempt, a superpowers dampening gas developed by S.T.A.R. Labs, some protective suits stolen from the U.S. Government and Brother Blood's own nefarious schemes. It is highly recommended and should keep players hopping.

This module was written by Jeff O'Hare, who also wrote the **Villains and Vigilantes** scenario **To Tackle the T.O.T.E.M.** which I favorably reviewed a couple of columns back. Good job, Jeff.

ORGANIZED CRIME

Speaking of **Villains and Vigilantes**, the other item up for review is **Organized Crimes**, a new V&V module written by Ken Cliffe. He takes us away from alien invasions and world-domination schemes to an excursion into the world of organized crime on the "mean streets" of New York.

Ken's "Author's Introduction" states that adopting this scenario for some other city besides New York would take a lot of work, but I turned it into a Sacramento, California—based **Champions** game with very little difficulty. There's a lot of difference in size of community, but Sacramento still has street gangs, crime and water access. It even has ocean-going traffic. In other words, it's not nearly as hard to adapt to other locales as Ken thinks.

This is a good, low-key adventure. No one is out to kill anyone (except for a rather nasty gentleman named Detonator) and the lead criminal, the Organizer, has high intelligence as his only superpower. Otherwise he is thoroughly ordinary. It's a good game for detectives and characters who revel in taking on hordes of thugs with their fists and quick wits. People used to high-powered battles will either find this a pleasant relief or deadly dull.

This adventure is highly recommended.

ARMED ROBBERY.. A HIGH SPEED CHASE THROUGH SLICK CITY STREETS.. AND A CACHE OF DIAMONDS. THE MAKINGS OF A ROUTINE MISSION— *UNTIL* YOUR HEROES CROSS PATHS WITH THE *ORGANIZER* AND FACE THE MENACE OF THE **MIDNIGHT MEN!!** (BRING PLENTY OF BANDAGES)

COMING EVENTS

That's about all over the transom in the last month. Mayfair Games claim that I will be receiving review copies of several new releases in time for the next column. Coming up is a solitaire run playing Batman against the Joker, a "generic" adventure for any hero investigating something called "Project Prometheus" and a 96-page sourcebook on the Batman, written by Blade Inc. stalwart Mike Stackpole. This last item will tell all about the Batman in game terms and include four adventures for Batplayers. Knowing Stackpole's wit and writing skill as I do, I really look forward to seeing what he has done with the Darknight Detective.

Hero Games has had little new lately because of their concentration on **Danger International**, which is finally at the printers as of this writing and will probably be at the stands by the time you read this.

Coming soon from Heroes is **Champions Organization Book Three: The Blood and Major McQuark**. I saw the proof sheets on this product while visiting this week and it looks good. Of course, reviews on all of these will be forthcoming.

I would review more TSR Marvel Super Heroes modules, but I haven't gotten review copies. Maybe someone there will remember to send me some!

CF

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Organized Crimes Fantasy Games Unlimited, P.O. Box 182, Roslyn, N.Y. 11578
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STEVE PERRIN CREATED BOTH THE ELFQUEST *AND* SUPERWORLD *GAMES ALONG WITH MANY OTHER ITEMS.*

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ALPHA FLIGHT
ONE SIDE, SUPER HEROES
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THE SUPER HERO WAS BORN IN AMERICA HALF A since. But in recent years people have gotten the revolutionary notion that since super villains direction. But none with any success until Marvel's Alpha Flight. Perhaps it took the influence of Canadian John Byrne to create a team of Canadian superheroes

The characters were first chronicled during Byrne's stint on **X-Men**. Vindicator appeared in issue 109 as Weapon Alpha. He returned in issues 120 & 121 bringing along the entire Alpha Flight team of Northstar, Shaman, Snowbird, Sasquatch and Aurora. Puck, Marrina and Talisman were later added in the regular **Alpha Flight** comic.

While Byrne created Alpha Flight, details of their background and makeup were added by Chris Claremont during their appearances in **X-Men** 120, 121, 139 & 140. Byrne didn't agree with some of the personality traits Claremont added. When Claremont wouldn't alter them, Byrne refused to allow Alpha Flight to appear in the **X-Men**. This led to Byrne's creation of the **Alpha Flight** comic. He intended to handle the group differently from the usual team in that the close-knit unit described in **X-Men** 120 & 121 was actually fragmented and wracked by internal conflicts. Before **Alpha Flight** was a reality, Byrne had talked of some day doing such a book and including Wolverine since the character had become so strongly linked to the Alphans. He joked that he'd like to use the character if Chris Claremont would ever let him go. The fact that Wolverine only appeared in a dream sequence in issue 13 and in a cameo surrounding an **X-Men** reprint in issue 17 tends to indicate that Claremont would indeed not release the character from his committment to the X-Men.

Despite the fact that **Alpha Flight** was a title featuring characters that he had created and developed, Byrne realized after two years that it was an experiment which was not entirely working out to his satisfaction. He began to long for new and different challenges. This is when Bill Mantlo, who was scripting the Hulk, entered the picture.

BILL MANTLO—CREATING A NEW DIRECTION

"John Byrne called me out of the blue and asked me how I would feel about writing **Alpha Flight**," Mantlo recalls.

FLIGHT

BY JAMES VAN HISE

CENTURY AGO. HE HAS TENDED TO BE BRED HERE EVER

rise in other nations, so probably do super good guys! Weak attempts have been made in this

"I thought he was joking because it was a book he'd created. But he said that he was tired of it and felt that he had run the gamut of things he could do with it. Plus he'd always wanted to draw the Hulk and his nostalgic desire was to go back to the old Kirby/Ditko days. I had pretty much run the gamut on the Hulk and so it sounded incredible. I jumped at the chance because I loved his characters and it seemed the perfect time for both of us to move on to things we really liked to do instead of treading water and possibly hurting books which we'd both done for quite awhile. So we switched."

The switchover was complete and included the editorial side of each book as well so that Carl Potts, who had been editing **The Hulk**, became the editor of **Alpha Flight** instead. Mike Mignola, who had been drawing **The Hulk**, only remained with **Alpha Flight** for three issues, but following three fill-ins, the title has now stabilized with David Ross as the regular artist.

"We think the switchover worked out pretty well and I'm excited as hell about it," Mantlo adds.

The first thing Mantlo did was change the focus of the book. Bill recognizes that his own view of the team is decidedly different from that of the book's creator.

"I think that John, after coming off the X-Men, was determined to do a book which was diametrically opposed to what he had done with Chris. **Alpha Flight** was a non-team team book in that John took a group of disparate individuals who didn't necessarily like each other and then hurled them at each other's throats to see what the chemistry would create. While his stories were tremendous, I believe he got lost somewhere along the line in that he completely forgot that Alpha Flight was supposed to be a team. As individual characters they were all interesting, but there was no glue holding them together. John would be the first to admit this.

"My first instinct was to pull them all back together as a team. There clearly was a basis for a team in that American comics are extremely chauvinistic but Canada has proven itself, through John

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Byrne, capable of producing heroes. Those heroes should be recognized as a force within the country. I used that as a springboard to put the team back together. Despite their differences, they're capable of living and functioning together." While Mantlo will still explore the differences in the characters, it will be in the context of the team. Some stories will feature one character more prominently, but it will be as part of the team ninety percent of the time.

In order to accomplish this, Mantlo had to take stock of the group to determine its new directions

"Sasquatch has gone to the great beyond. Whether he stays there or not I have yet to determine. But with him gone I'm going to have to deal with Aurora's grief and with what his absence means to both Aurora and Northstar. I've dropped hints in the book that both of them were equally grief-stricken. Now that they find that they have more in common than they thought, they can no longer come together. If they touch, they negate each other's powers. This is a direct result of Aurora's misunderstanding of Northstar's motivation for keeping her away from Sasquatch. She altered her biochemistry completely so that the twins are no longer twins in terms of power. Because of Langkowski's experimentation on Aurora, they cancel each other out. Now that they're closer than ever, they're farther apart than before. We're going to try to bring them to at least a psychic raproachmont, but for the present they cannot hug or make any contact with each other."

Tying in with Alpha Flight's last appearance in **X-Man** 140, the first issue of the book in 1983 portrayed the team being disbanded by the Canadian government only to reteam as a private organization. Mantlo has brought the group back into the fold as the government has seen the error of its ways and recognized the incredible potential of having a team of super heroes as part of the national defense structure.

"But Alpha Flight is going to find out that even though they were guaranteed that there would be no strings attached, there are strings. There will be a lot of bad blood between them and Ottawa and a new understanding will have to be carved out. But essentially they are Canada's super team. They are loyal to and desirous of protecting their nation. But they are by no means servants or agents of the Canadian government. That's something that the government may find hard to swallow even as it desires super heroes as part of its defense position. This may also pit them against the government in that the government wants to know if there are more of these beings. If there are, can they trust them? And if they can't, can they control them? Questions along those lines will be raised. I hope to deal more and more with the Canadian

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political climate in a more realistic sense. The only time that it has ever been dealt with at all meaningfully or fairly was back in the Chris Claremont/John Byrne **X-Men** when they had Trudeau pop up.

"Canada has second nation status, which I think we'll be addressing. This means that Alpha Flight is a second rate super team. We'll be addressing those questions as we l as things like whether Canada really needs this defense program and this super team."

Inextricably linked with Alpha Flight is one ex-member who was around before the team was even fully formed—Wolverine.

"He was originally part of Dept. H and there will be major revelations in **Alpha Flight** 33 and 34 when Wolverine encounters Heather again," Mantlo reveals. "These are revelations about his past, about his relationship with James MacDonald Hudson and Heather. This will bridge over into an X-Men story which

BILL MANTLO'S OTHER TEAM
CLOAK & DAGGER

One of the most unusual super duos to grace comic books in the past several years is Cloak & Dagger. The result of illicit drug experimentation, they haunt the highways and byways frequented only by those who prey on society by purveying mind-altering drugs.

Bill Mantlo created these characters and through one mini-series and now a regular bi-monthly title, guides their curious destiny. Rick Leonardi and Terry Austin have been the artists most closely linked with this book. They brought a unique vision to the grim reality. Unfortunately, deadline problems recently led to Leonardi being replaced on the title.

"Terry Austin is still inking it so thankfully it looks terrific and there's no loss in quality. It's not Rick Leonardi," Mantlo admits, "but with Terry there, he's really the glue that's held everything together. I'm very sorry that Rick is gone and I really hate the fact that it was a deadline that caused him to be removed from the book. He was as much a part of the characters as I was. Now we're just desperately trying to find someone to take his place and this has not been easy because there are not many people as good as Rick Leonardi."

This adds to the delay in making the title a monthly comic. Thus Mantlo hasn't been able to work any unusual crossovers or even deal with the Cloak & Dagger episode in **New Mutants** when the pair both lost and regained their powers.

"Chris Claremont and I did talk those stories out," Mantlo explains. Whenever we have characters cross over we make voluminous notes and make sure that we don't step on each other's toes. I knew what he was doing and intended to feed off it at some point, but since **Cloak & Dagger** is bi-monthly, I just haven't had the opportunity.

"That's the real problem in a bi-monthly," Mantlo continues. "You either have to just do your own stories or refer to somebody else's stories. Rick and I had a solid year's worth of plotlines before I ever heard of Chris's story, so we decided to go ahead and do what we had already planned. We were told that the book would be made monthly. We'd pick up the crossovers with the regular Marvel universe and refer to all the things that have been mentioned. But now we're going to stay bi-monthly, so we'll probably not get the chance to do a lot of that. The bottom line is what while I would have liked to have done a crossover to contrast my characters with others, I feel that my Cloak & Dagger stories are so good that I'm not going to bemoan it too much."

One character that has managed to appear in the pages of **Cloak & Dagger** is Spider-Man.

"That's the book they were co-created in so that seems a natural. I love writing Spider-Man and I wish more than anything that I was still writing it. They belong with Spider-Man and he belongs with them. There's a certain amount of inter-relationship that I want to maintain. But it would not be natural to do a Cloak & Dagger tie-in right now with, say, Captain America. They don't have any relationship although one may become possible eventually. It's just not necessary right now. Cloak & Dagger have their own world view and their own crises and problems. Part of me wants to write **Cloak & Dagger** as a purist and part of me loves Marvel comics and wants to do all the team-ups and crossovers that everybody else does."

Some of those special projects are already in the offing. Mantlo is hoping to do a **Cloak & Dagger** annual in '86 but in the works right now is a graphic novel featuring the mysterious duo. Who will draw the **Cloak & Dagger** graphic novel? Mantlo is a but mysterious himself when he replies, "That is a secret."

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Chris Claremont and Barry Smith are doing. Clearly he's going to have to appear and reappear in the title because of his relationship with Heather and because of what he learns about his background from her. It will be necessary for him to either come into contact or conflict with Alpha Flight again."

There are some things about Alpha Flight which won't be changing immediately though.

"In my first string of issues," Mantlo states, "the villains are all indigenous Alpha Flight villains, like Deadly Earnest. I'm creating several new villains and subcharacters and I may create a whole new team to first battle Alpha Flight and then learn from their example as to how to be heroes. Then I'll have them come into contact with classic Marvel villains, but only to illustrate points about who Alpha Flight is and what their relationship with Canada is.

"Although I don't want to continue being parochial, the biggest impediment to having the team branch out was always Snowbird who couldn't leave Canada because she was bound to the land. That will be resolved by issue 39 so that they can travel all over the world and become an international super team just as other Marvel teams are. They will then start to get a greater awareness of their role in the world and how to act in that role."

ARTIST DAVID ROSS— THE NEW VISION

Artist Mike Mignola switched to **Alpha Flight** along with the rest of the **Hulk**'s creative team. But he found it necessary to leave after only three issues (although he still has a connection to the book in that he is working on the Alpha Flight graphic novel).

David Ross is a newcomer. His first regular assignment is drawing **Alpha Flight** and he plans to stick with the title for quite awhile. His previous professional work includes the Binary story recently published in **Marvel Fanfare** 24, last summer's **Batman and the Outsiders** annual and DC's **Star Trek** annual. Ross states that it's just a coincidence that he is a Canadian artist drawing a comic book featuring a Canadian super team. Since he was inheriting a series which was established by John Byrne (yet another Canadian artist), Ross consulted with him on certain elements of the series.

"I had a short talk with him about the fine points of the designs he had done, not for the characters but for the surroundings of the mansion and things like that. I'm trying to keep things familiar to the readers. I've been looking at the material that John did an awful lot, but I don't think that I draw anything like John," Ross states.

In describing Ross's work on **Alpha Flight**, Bill Mantlo says, "He's constantly creating and innovating and it's in-

MEANWHILE, GOING TO CUT LOGAN OPEN AND HURT HIM AGAIN!
HEATHER! ABOUT'S TIME FOR SOME ANY FIGHT!
NO. I'M NOT WOLVERINE! IT'S OURS! ONE WELL FIGHT TOGETHER!
SO THAT MAYBE I WEARING MY HUSBAND'S BATTLE SUIT - CAN USE IT TO SAVE MY HUSBAND'S CREATION!
ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FORCE - BURSTS CRACKLE...

AND SHEAR THROUGH THE RANKS OF LADY DEATHSTRIKE'S ASSEMBLED SAMURAI.
(ALTHOUGH WOLVERINE'S COMPANION POSSESSES POWER, SHE MUST NOT IMPEDE OUR PLANS! KILL HER--!)
(--AND TAKE WOLVERINE, DEAD OR ALIVE!)

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The emphasis will be on teamwork although some issues will concentrate on individual team members.

spirational working with somebody like that because he just doesn't stop thinking. The drawing is impeccable and the two of us seem to have clicked perfectly. I'm real excited! It's been a long time since I've worked with people like that."

Editor Carl Potts echoes Mantlo's praise and states, "He's very good, very intelligent and very into his work. He thinks constantly, asks all the right questions and is becoming a real good storyteller. I have a lot of high hopes for him."

Ross demonstrates his involvement with the series when he tries to explore the facets of Alpha Flight which have never been examined.

"There were some things about the characters that were never worked out," Ross observes, "and which John kept us in the dark about. I was talking with Bill Mantlo about this because I was curious about what sort of things these characters would do in their spare time. What sort of music do they listen to? What do they like to do for hobbies? Are some of them sports-minded or more inclined to sit down and read a book? Things to fill out their character and give a more rounded sense to their personality."

Ross is studying classic Marvel team books to see how they achieved balance in illustration.

"I look at a lot of John Buscema books to see how he dealt with having a lot of characters running around and not having the pages look cluttered. There seems to be a real art to that. There's a tendency by a lot of today's artists to end up with a cluttered look. Perhaps you see this because there's so much being called for. If there's a lot of characters in the group, maybe a writer isn't thinking as visually as he could and is specifically calling for a lot of shots with characters in them—one on top of the other. I think that any artist has to go through that and make the changes which are required to make it flow visually. I have to simplify now and then if there are a lot of characters—I have to decide if it's really necessary to show all of the Alphans in that situation or maybe just show bits and pieces of them instead of full figures. Just enough to let people know that they're there without having to clutter panels. So I tend to try to keep it a little simpler."

David Ross has had a keen interest in the art of John Byrne ever since he first saw it back in the early days of **Iron Fist**. He recognizes a difference between Alpha Flight as they were back in **X-Men** 120 and as they appeared in their own title.

"The biggest difference I can see is that in that X-Men story, they were treated as a very cohesive team who didn't seem to have any problems. I remember when Wolverine couldn't understand why the X-Men were falling apart against Alpha Flight after they'd taken on such heavy duty villains. Shaman remarks: 'The problem is teamwork. We have it, you don't.' Then as

I NEEDED TO KNOW WHETHER ANY POWER EXISTED WITHIN ME RATHER THAN IN SOME BAG OF TRICKS!
YOU ONCE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE MAGICKS OF YOUR MEDICINE POUCH WERE OF YOUR OWN CONJURING!
PLUCKED FROM SOME OTHER REALM AS THE NEED AROSE.
THAT REALM ALMOST TOOK MY DAUGHTER! I MUST BE FREE OF IT! HAVE I NO POWER OF MY OWN?
TO DETERMINE THAT, YOU MUST BE TESTED, GRANDSON, BY THE SPIRITS ATTENDING THIS PLACE OF POWER!

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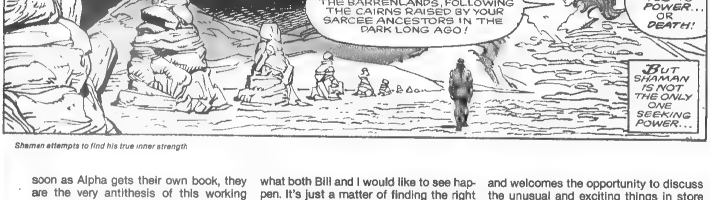
WALK FORTH, MICHAEL TWOYOUNGMEN, OUT ACROSS THE BARRENLANDS, FOLLOWING THE CAIRNS RAISED BY YOUR SARCEE ANCESTORS IN THE DARK LONG AGO!
THE TRAIL WILL LEAD YOU TO POWER... OR DEATH!
BUT SHAMAN IS NOT THE ONLY ONE SEEKING POWER...

Shaman attempts to find his true inner strength

soon as Alpha gets their own book, they are the very antithesis of this working together in harmony. That's really the major difference I've noticed between their appearance in the X-Men and their later appearances.

"It's interesting to see characters evolve," Ross continues. "Aurora was the standard wine glass-shaped full-figure girl and Northstar was a little beefier. They both became very lean in the regular book. The group is also very different from what it started out to be as we've had the introduction of Marinna and Puck. Puck has had a very strong bearing on the character of Alpha Flight. I think of him as being a very important character. Not just in terms of what he does in the stories, but also in the general feel of the group."

Gone from the group is Sasquatch. Just like many other fans, David Ross misses him.

"From a visual standpoint and a character standpoint, he will be sorely missed. If there is some way in the future that he can be brought back, then we may very well do that. Nothing has been worked out at this point, but I think that's what both Bill and I would like to see happen. It's just a matter of finding the right kind of story that would be interesting and would hold up in terms of what has gone before. I'd love to see Sasquatch return."

Bill Mantlo welcomes creative input from the artists he works with. Sometime after issue 39, the plots will reflect ideas that Ross has brought to the book.

"What I'm working on now is a lot of stuff he worked on and developed when Mike Mignola was on the book. We'll soon be getting into the material that I've had a little more input on."

EDITOR CARL POTTS— OVERSEEING THE FUTURE

Carl Potts began his association with Marvel as an artist. Head editor Jim Shooter recognized his managerial skills and asked him to edit. Although Potts hopes to return to drawing one day, he greatly enjoys editing comics.

Team books tend to be complicated, especially when they contain characters as disparate as the members of Alpha Flight. But Potts has taken to this series and welcomes the opportunity to discuss the unusual and exciting things in store for the coming months.

"Issues 33 and 34 are a two-part story where Heather flies south to meet with Wolverine. She gets involved in a situation with him where we learn a lot about Wolverine's past. This involves how Mac Hudson found Wolverine in the first place and how Heather initially reacted to that. There'll also be a new villainess named Lady Deathstrike," Potts reveals, "who claims that she owns the adamantium skeleton that's inside Wolverine and wants to reclaim it."

Issue 35 begins the subplots which will lead up to the Alpha Flight/Avengers crossover a few issues down the line.

"This story is titled 'The Child is Father to the Man.' Some of the setup will be in Atlantis where Attuma has captured Marrina and is torturing her, trying to show the people of Atlantis what sort of monster it was that their former ruler wanted to marry. This also features the pilgrimage of Shaman to regain his mystic powers. He must go through a mystical gauntlet and learn about himself and his

Original pencils & inks from Alpha Flight on this and the following two pages are by David Ross—courtesy of Marvel Comics.

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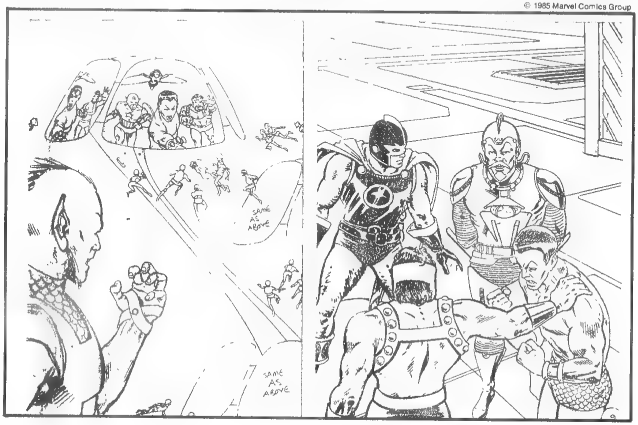

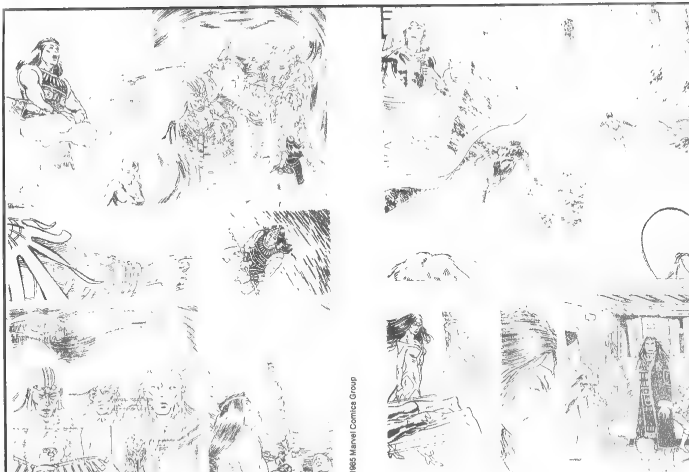

relationship to his magic and his people.

"Issue 36 is called 'Labor Pains.' Snowbird is pregnant by her Mounty husband and this strange combination of heritages is causing weird complications. Also, in this issue, the Sub-Mariner's cousin, Prince Byrrih, leaves Atlantis to tell Namor that Marrina has been captured. Shaman calls on Dr. Strange to help him locate the best mystical spot for Snowbird to deliver her baby.

"Issue 37 is called 'Deathbirth' and will feature a new villain, Pestilence, who is a survivor of an old whaling ship from the last century who was frozen alive. He has come into contact with certain mystical powers and is secretly manipulating the events around the birth of Snowbird's baby so that his lifeforce can inhabit the baby and corrupt it. We set up the introduction of Pestilence in this issue but don't actually see him try to corrupt the birth until issue 38. Also in 37, Talisman comes to berate her father, Shaman, and show off how her powers are so much stronger than his are. She is also still berating him for allowing her to be lost in the world of his pouch in an earlier issue.

Issue 38, titled "Pestilence," marks the climax of the sequence involving the birth of Snowbird's child.

"It turns out that Talisman was unwittingly aiding Pestilence," Potts reveals, "and Pestilence really rakes Alpha Flight over the coals at the birthplace of Snowbird's baby. Shaman has to decide if he should take the responsibility of permanently becoming the Talisman himself. They at least temporarily defeat Pestilence at the end of issue 38.

"Issue 39 is called 'To Invade Atlantis' and sets up the crossover with the Avengers." While Namor rescues Marrina in this crossover, the events prove to be a set up for even more major events which will come to pass later in 1986 in the **Alpha Flight** graphic novel.

What kept coming up while talking with the writer, the artist and the editor of **Alpha Flight** is the absence of Sasquatch. Is this very popular character truly dead and gone?

"He's as dead as any charcter can be in comic books," Potts states. "I'm always reluctant to say that something is absolutely, positively certain. For all I know, someone will come up with a great idea for a revival down the line that we'll be convinced is worth doing. He was very popular, which does make him attractive to return."

If there is one thing which **Alpha Flight** became known for over the past couple of years, it is that it played against expectation and used the unexpected to shape its storylines. This involved the death of the Vindicator, his seeming return and the shocking revelation surrounding that as well as the fate of Sasquatch.

But Alpha Flight seems to be making definite changes in direction under the new creative team. It is no longer a self-destructive team being pulled apart from within. Rather, the group has realigned and refocused its priorities, putting the old differences behind them to face the new and greater challenges ahead. **Alpha Flight** remains a very unusual but nonetheless, indulging in mysticism and weird fantasy as much as in the traditional realms of the superhero. This combination cannot help but continue to produce surprises.

CF

Comics Consumer Guide

MARVEL COMICS

SHIPPING 1/7/86

Activators 1 (Trimpe)

Cloak & Dagger 6 (Mantlo/Leonardi/Austin)

Daredevil 230—"Born Again" by Frank Miller &David Mazzucchelli.

New Mutants 39—Claremont/Pollard/Rubenstein.

Red Sonja 13—L. Simonson/Wilshire/Nichols.

Squadron Supreme 9—Issue 9 of a 12 part mini-series. Gruenwald/Ryan/De la Rosa.

The Thing 35—Carlin/Neary/De Mulder.

Web of Spider-Man 14—Michelinie/Harris/Baker/Beacher & Rubinstein.

West Coast Avengers 8—Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott

Conan the King 34—Kraar/Docherty/Colleta.

Swords of Swashbucklers 6—Mantlo/Isherwood

SHIPPING 1/14/86

Alpha Flight 34—Mantlo/S. Buscema/Talaoc.

Amazing Spider-Man 276—DeFalco/Frenz/Rubenstein.

Captain America 317—Gruenwald/Neary/Janke.

Firestar 3—De Falco/Wilshire/Leialoha. Mini-series, Issue 3 of 4.

Groo, the Wanderer 15—Argones with Evanier

Micronauts 20—Gillis/Jones/Bulanadi. Last issue.

Power Pack 22—Simonson/Bogdanove/Wlacek. First issue by the new, regular artist, John Bogdanove.

Vision & Scarlet Witch 8—Englehart Howell/Springer. Miniseries, issue 8 of 12.

Fantastic Four Index 6

The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe 6—Issue 6 of 12.

Savage Sword of Conan 123—Yakata/Chan.

The One 5—Veitch.

Ewoks 7—Manak/Kremer/Roettcher.

Young Astronauts 1—O'Neil/Brigman/Redding.

SHIPPING 1/21/86

Marvel Age 38—Cover by Wilson.

Avengers 267—Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer.

Balder the Brave 4—Simonson/S. Buscema. Last issue.

Conan the Barbarian 182—Owsley/J. Buscema/Camp.

Eternals 8—Gillis/S. Buscema/Pollard. Miniseries, Issue 8 of 12.

G.I. Joe 47—Hama/Whigham/Mushynsky/Zeck & Beatty.

Incredible Hulk 319—Byrne/Williams.

Marvel Tales 187—Lee/Romita/Esposito. Reprinting Spiderman 47.

Power Man 123—Owsley/Bright/Acerno.

The Punisher 5—S. Grant/Zeck/Beatty/Zimmerman. Final issue

Seloman Kane 5—Macchio/Breeding/Williamson.

X-Man 205—Claremont/Barry Windsor-Smith.

Marvel Saga 6.

Marvel Fanfare 26—Moench/Broderick/Breeding.

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Elfquest 10—Wendy & Richard Pini.

Fantastic Four 290—Byrne/Gordon.

Iron Man 206—O'Neil/Bright/Akin & Garvey.

Peter Parker 114—David/McLeod/Buckler.

Sectaurs 6—Mantlo/Geiger/Williams.

Star Wars 105—Duffy/Martin.

Thor 367—Simonson.

Transformers 16—Budiansky/Perlin/Williams/Trimpe.

X-Factor 4—Layton/Guice.

Doctor Who 20.

Savage Tales 4.

Six From Sirius II 4—Moench/Gulacy. Last issue. Direct Sales only.

Care Bears 4—Kay/Post/Edelman.

Peter Parker 7—Skeates/Armstrong/Albelo.

DC COMICS

SHIPPING 1/14/86

DC Comics Presents 93—Kupperberg/Saviuk. Superman, Elastic Lad, Elongated Man and Plastic Man.

Justice League of America 250—Conway/McDonnel/Wray.

Fury of Firestorm 47—Conway/Brozowski/Machlan/Giordano

Hex 9—Fleisher/Texeira/Garzon.

Tales of the Teen Titans 65—Wolfman/Jurgens/Tanghal/Bolland.

Legionnaires Three 4—Giffen/Newell/Colon/Kesel. Miniseries.

The Legend of Wonder Woman 1—Trina Robbins/K. Busiek. Miniseries.

Vigilante 29—Kupperberg/T. Smith/Magyar/Rogers. Direct sales only.

The Outsiders 7—Barr—Aparo. Direct sales only

SHIPPING 1/21/86

Batman 395—Moench/Mandrake.

Superman 419—Maggin/Swan/Hunt.

Star Trek 25—Rozakis/Sutton/Villagran.

G.I. Combat 283—Kanigher/Glanzman/Kubert.

Aquaman 4—Pozner/Hamilton/Montano/Russell. Miniseries.

Secret Origins 2—Wein/Kane. Features Blue Beetle.

'Mazing Man 5—Rozakis/De—Stefano/Kesel.

Elvira's House of Mystery 3—Cavalieri/Oksner

Omega Men 38—Klein/McManus. Direct Sales only.

Legion of Super-Heroes 22—Levitz/LaRocque/Mahlstedt. Direct sales only.

Electric Warrior 1—Moench/Balkie. Direct sales only.

SHIPPING 1/28/88

Swamp Thing 48—Moore/Totleben/Bissette.

Adventures of the Outsiders 33—Barr/Davis.

Green Lantern 200—Englehart/Staton/Simonson.

Warlord 105—Fleisher/Randall.

Blue Devil 24—Mishkin/Kupperberg/Collins/Cullins/Martin.

Who's Who 15.

Booster Gold 4—Jurgens/DeCarlo.

Infinity Inc. 26—R. & D. Thomas/McFarlane/Dezuniga/Giordano. Direct sales only.

The New Teen Titans 20—Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal. Direct sales only

Death of the Justice Society of America Graphic Novel—R. Thomas/Ross/Gustovich.

SHIPPING 2/25/88

Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes 335—Levitz/Lightle/Mahlstedt.

Action 579—Lofficier/Giffen.

Detective 562—Moench/Colan/B. Smith/Giordano.

All-Star Squadron 57—R. Thomas/Clark/Acerno & various others.

V 16—Bates/Infantino/DeZuniga/Bingham.

Deadman 3—Helfer/Garcia/Lopez. Miniseries.

DC Challenge 7—Kupperberg/Staton/Mitchell. Miniseries.

The Shadow 1—Howard Chaykin. Miniseries.

THE SHADOW #1

COMICO

Robotech Masters 5.

Robotech, The New Generation 5.

DELUXE

Thunder Agents 4—George Perez, Keith Giffen, Murphy Anderson, Rich Buckler, Steve Ditko, Ernie Colon, Greg Theakston, John Workman, Mike Harris, Rick Bryant and Patl.

EAGLE

2000 A.D. Monthly 2—Wagner/Grant/Ewins/Moore/Davis/Balkie/White.

Judge Dredd: The Early Cases 4—Wagner/McMahon/Gibson.

True Love 1—Dave Stevens/Alex Toth/Nick Cardy/Ralph Maye & others.

Miracleman 5.

The New DNAgents 5—Evanier/Schauer/Blyberg.

Laser Eraser & Pressbutton 3—Pedro Henry/Jerry Paris & Garry Leach.

Johnny Nemo 3—Peter Milligan and Brett Ewins.

SHIPPING 1/28/88

Judge Dredd 31—Wagner/Grant/Ezquerra. Cover by Cam Kennedy.

ECLIPSE

Scout 3—Truman.

Tales of Terror 4.

Crossfire 17—Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle.

Seduction of the Innocent 3-D 2—Berni Wrightson, Alex Toth, Matt Baker, Vic Fodera.

True Love 2—Alex Toth/Nick Cardy/others.

Lenn 1—Frank Thorne.

FANTAGRAPHICS

Daigoda 8—Jan Strnad, Dennis Fujitake, Mark Wheatley, Alan Moore, Steve Parkhouse and Ken Smith.

FIRST

Nexus 20—Baron/Rude/Nyberg/Barta.

Badger 11—Reinhold/Baron/Gustovich/Wagner & Martin.

Grimjack 22—Sutton/Ostrander/Guinan/Bolland.

Alter Ego 1—Harris/Thomas/Wagner.

American Flagg 29—Chaykin/Staton/Barta.

Dynamo Joe 1—Rice/Ostrander/B. Thomas.

Jon Sable 36—Grell

Hawkmoon: The Jewel in the Skull 1—Conway/Kayanan/Alcala.

LIGHTNING

Codename Danger 4—Gulacy/Leach/Fleming.

LETTERS

Address Correspondence To:

COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Suite 210
Canoga Park, CA 91304

Dear Editor,

G'day from Down-under! You want letters? Here's one all the way from Australia. Let me start by saying that I discovered your magazine by accident. I noticed it at a local newsagent one day and thought it well worth the investment. So much so that I now get it every month through my comics speciality store (yes—we have those down here as well).

What attracted me to your magazine? I think initially the sort of articles that the magazine contained for the low cover price was a big bonus. As the months have progressed I have been surprised at the amount of information that's out there, waiting to be put into print.

O.K.—let's get down to the nitty gritty. What do I like most, what do I dislike and what would I like to see more of?

Likes: Anything nostalgic, be it the excellent "Strip Search!" column (although I would like maybe two issues on more major strips e.g.—your Dick Tracy special).

:Your games section is something different and provides another area of comic influence. I am a role-player myself and find this column very interesting even though I'm not playing any Super Hero games.

:"Comics of the Golden/Silver Age" has to stay, if only to let more recent collectors know what they've missed out on in the past.

:Animated Antics is fine but again I would appreciate more emphasis on past shows (Thanks for the issues on Jonny Quest—one of my all-time favorites) from the days before the "Moral Majority" censors got to all the cartoon shows!

Dislikes: Not many. The Comics Consumer Guide can go out of the window as far as I'm concerned—you've only got to pick up any months copy of any comic to find out what else is for sale that month.

:Interviews are fine as long as they don't get carried away. I can only take so much of "This is how I started in comics etc, etc".

:I'm very glad that the 12 pages of adverts has disappeared from the center pages.

What would I like to see? Not much that you aren't already doing! Please have a bit more emphasis on other comics besides Marvel. There are some really great Independent companies out there, not to mention what's going on in the U.K.—have you guys seen the quality in "2000 AD"?

A few more interviews (see, I do like interviews!) with comic strip artists—e.g. Jim (Garfield) Davis, Dik (Hagar) Browne. *PLEASE* can anything be done on Carl Barks or the Belgian artist Herge (Tintin)?

If not, never mind. I knew you asked for suggestions and hopefully I've given you a few ideas. Sorry about the length of the letter but I thought you would appreciate a long detailed letter. Seeing that I don't live just around the corner I thought I'd better make it worthwhile

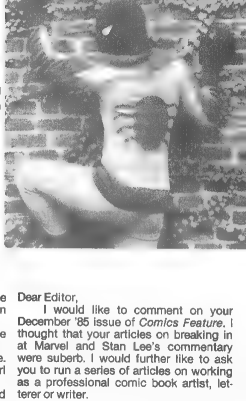
In closing I'd like to say how very much I enjoy your magazine. Just keep doing what you're doing and I'll be a long time reader. Looking forward to continued correspondence.

Till the "Teen Titans" get pensions,
Yours sincerely,
Lee Sheppard
66 Shillington Way,
Thornlie 6108
Western Australia

Lee—Thanks for the tremendous letter! Please keep us posted on your reactions. And everyone please remember to deluge us with column title suggestions, "Letters" is so dull! And you will win a free year's worth of CF if we choose your title.

"How about: The Official Marvel Comics Halloween Costume Pattern Book?"

Jim McLennan in homemade Spidey garb



Dear Editor,

I would like to comment on your December '85 issue of *Comics Feature*. I thought that your articles on breaking in at Marvel and Stan Lee's commentary were suberb. I would further like to ask you to run a series of articles on working as a professional comic book artist, letterer or writer.

I sincerely hope that you can fulfill my request.

Faithfully Yours,
Griffin Gappert
899 Hereford Dr.
Akron, Ohio
44313

Griffin—Does Stan the Man's new series fill the bill?—Happy Hal

Dear "Happy Hal,"

I have just picked up my first issue of *Comics Feature* (39). I thought that it was one of the best comic book magazines in a long time! I have read this one many times over! I especially like the Comics Consumer Guide.

On page 4, I would have liked to see reviews on the two new books (**The Comic Book Heroes** and **Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit**). "Stan Lee Sounds Off" was my favorite article. "Breaking In at Marvel"

There are some really great independent companies out there, not to mention what's going on in the UK—have you guys seen the quality in 2000 AD?

Lee Sheppard

was equally as good.

I would like to see a page devoted to The Marvel or DC character of the month. Also maybe a page on the top-selling titles.

Well, keep up the *Great* work!!

yours Truly,
Geof Carter
175 S. West St.
Hillsdale, MI.
49242

Geof—Good to hear from you and even happier that you enjoy CF! Could you clarify how the character of the month would differ from our lead feature and/or "Heroes" column?—Happy Hal

Dear Sirs,

I would like to see another Hero History in Comics Feature. Please, do one on the Legion of Superheroes.

I enjoyed Stan's article again. It's nice to know how the pros create characters.

Your magazine is interesting and informative. How does one submit material.

I have some ideas on what makes a character lasting and/or popular I'd like to share.

I'd also like to do an article on "predictions," what I think is ahead for various books.

Wanting to participate. . .
David Schuldt
10J RR2
Rantoul, IL.
61866

David—Submissions should be typed clearly on plain white paper and double-spaced with one inch margins. Only type on one side of the page. Please send only after making a copy for your records. Send with a SASE—Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope—and sit back and wait a couple of months!—Happy Hal

Dear Stan,

I read your article in COMICS FEATURE about breaking into the business, so here's my "Burgeoning little billet doux."

My first idea is for a comic that would be released once a year. It would not be a comic in the normal sense. It would be released about the end of September or the beginning of October, just in time for Halloween. Is this name long enough for you? *The Official Marvel Comics Halloween Costume Pattern Book*. This comic would show people how to make costumes of their favorite super-heroes. Let's take Spider-Man for an example. The mask could be made from a red ski-mask and a black magic marker. Please notice the photo enclosed. Each issue could show how to make costumes for three or four characters.

Jim McLennan
Whitestone, NY

Jim—Thought readers would like a look at this. Nice idea.—Holistic Hal

Dear Comics Feature:

I just read your December issue. It's great, but I'd like to see you guys put a price guide in CF about every 3 months or so. Also, could you get more indepth news? I like all of your articles and I will keep collecting as long as I can find your magazine. Your *X-Factor* issue was great! I am a new fan of CF! I liked the Green Lantern column, it was great.

Clay Powell
Magna, Utah

Clay—Good to have a new regular reader. It helps keep CF alive! Does anyone else really want a price guide? —Happy Hal

Dear Stan,

I bought COMICS FEATURE for the "Turning Pro" article. I was pleased and well-informed by your comments.

It is a pleasure to get good information that is equally practical.

Please, pass on some comments on the mag as a whole.

Jim Shooter's advice was a boost for me in my desire to become a pro. It's nice to know you can work in the industry and make a living.

I enjoyed the Lantern article.

Steve Englehart has made me a fan. The background was really nice.

The editorial—yes, you answered most of my questions.

Sorry, but the feature news and consumer guide were out of date by the time I received the book.

Fun and Profit—I think I will always maintain that the best profit is to buy what you like and share it with a friend. Trying to invest seems to accomplish little but raising back issue prices.

Letters—your comments inspired me to write! I started off trying to just tell Stan what I'd like to see. You've done a good job and that wasn't enough.

Animated Antics—I've enjoyed Mr. Bakshi's work on *The Rings*. I wish *Fire & Ice* would come to my area. Unfortunately I was too young for the rest of his movies. Anyhow, the background was nice.

Pubs Picks—I like it but wish it had more of a review nature.

Well, that should keep you busy for awhile.

With thanks,
David Schuldt
Rantoul, IL

P.S. Stan, thank you for all the great times; it's been a blast.

David—Thank you for writing. I'm glad that you enjoyed the issue. Unfortunately, at the moment I lack both time & space to expand Pub Picks. Perhaps if enough readers demanded it, leaving me no choice. . .Humble Hal.

Dear Editor,

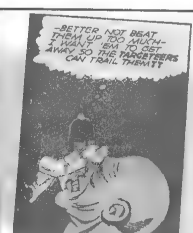
I wonder if you might know a comic book company that would buy a comic book character from me? I have created a comic book character myself; also written a story for it. I was wondering how to patent my character with the least cost. Also, how can I get all the royalties from my character without someone cutting in? I certainly would appreciate the information. Thank you!

Michael Painter
Supply, NC

Michael—You should directly contact one of the editors at a comic book company such as Marvel or DC, if your creation is really ready to fly. Otherwise work on your skills a bit first. Then, when you're really ready—take your best shot! — Happy Hal

LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

RON GOULART



1940 was a real boom year for comic books. Dozens of new titles—from **Zip** to **All-Star** hit the stands and all sorts and conditions of publishers were jumping into what looked to be a lucrative field. Early that year even the venerable Curtis Publishing Company of Philadelphia, publisher of the **Saturday Evening Post** and the **Ladies' Home Journal**, quietly entered the funny book business. Calling itself Novelty Press, Inc. and operating out of editorial offices on West 52nd Street in New York City, Curtis brought forth the first of its line. The premiere issue of **Target Comics** bore a cover date of February, 1940 and not one of the magazine's better characters was yet in evidence. Within a year, however, the situation improved and a costumed crimefighter, a master of disguise and the incomparable Basil Wolverton's most successful space hero had been added to the lineup.

SOME MISSES

Vol. 1, No. 1 of **Target** was not especially socko. This is somewhat surprising, since the contents were turned out by Funnies, Inc. This shop, run by Lloyd Jacquet, was also producing **Marvel Mystery Comics**, which introduced the Human Torch, Sub-Mariner and the Angel to the world. Two of the shop's heavyhitters created characters for **Target**, but neither came up with a winner. Bill Everett drew "Bull's-Eye Bill," a straightforward feature about a contemporary cowboy who owned the Target Ranch in Arizona. Everett had spent part of his youth in similar country, yet the strip came nowhere near matching his unrealistic Sub-Mariner. Everett rode off into the sunset after a few issues, leaving Bill to a string of lesser artists. "The White Streak" was the invention of Carl Burgos. Like his more successful Human Torch, the Streak was an android. After a long spell of being dormant in South America, he returns to life and explains himself thusly: "I'm the last of the servants of a dead civilization, dedicated to mete out justice to those murderers who prey on the weak—the warmongers!"

An antiwar activist at that point in history had his work cut out for him and the Streak, AKA Manowar, was kept busy all over the world. He possessed all sorts of admirable superpowers, including the ability to fly. Whereas the Torch could do tricks with fire, the White Streak could pull similar stunts with what we were told were "electronics." These particular electronics closely resembled lightning bolts. As drawn in Burgos' appealingly clumsy style, Manowar was an ugly fellow with an expressionless (as well as noseless) face. He wore a blue tunic, red tights, a golden belt and a green helmet.

In Vol. 1, No. 10 (November, 1940) he decides to join the FBI to combat fifth columnists and saboteurs. Realizing that his distinctive looks may be a handicap, he allows the FBI to get a well-known plastic surgeon to remake his face. From then on he's just an ordinary seeming handsome guy in a business suit.

Burgos couldn't seem to make up his mind about whether or not to use a superhero. In the August, 1941 issue he added a new costumed chap named the Red Seal to aid the plainclothes Streak. The Seal had a big red cross emblazoned on the chest of his black tunic and he sported a moustache. He arrives on the scene just as the White Streak is apparently blown to bits by saboteurs. During the next episode, the last one drawn by Burgos, the Streak remains off the scene. In the following issue, though, he's back as his old android self. "The explosion must have thrown a live wire across my body," he explains to the Red Seal, "and the electricity converted me into an electrical mass, keeping me in suspended animation until now! So here I am in my original form!" This new team of superguys only stayed in business through the December, 1941 issue. The final artist was Emil Gershwin, working in his creditable version of the Alex Raymond style.

That first issue of Target also contained "T-Men—The 'G-Men' of the U.S. Treasury Department"—drawn by a solo Joe Simon; "Fantasy Films," a sort of blood and thunder "Minute Movies," by Tarpe "Miss Fury" Mills; "The Hi-Grass Twins," a hillbilly comedy filler by the formidable Jack Cole. A magazine that encouraged reader response, **Target** conducted polls in second and third issues to determine the most popular characters in their lackluster group. Shortly thereafter there were some changes made.

SOME HITS

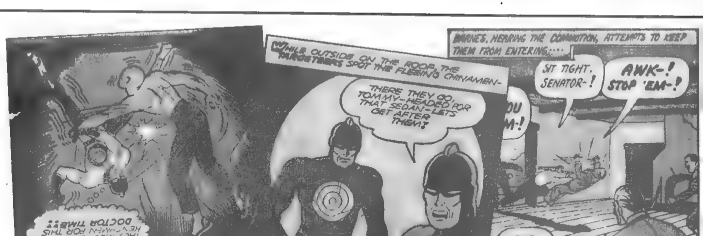
"With the coming of interplanetary travel, the legions of the law found it impossible to cope with pirates, killers, and other criminals lurking in space. . . . Then,

Novelty Press: TARGET

apparently out of nowhere comes the superhuman enemy of crime, the mysterious SPACEHAWK!" These stirring phrases were to be found in the fifth issue of **Target** and served to introduce Basil Wolverton's first story about his "lone wolf of the void." All together Spacehawk appeared in thirty issues, gracing the cover solo but once. His adventures took place initially in the far reaches of space, shifting later to the wartime Earth exclusively. Walterton's Earth, however, like the rest of his universe, was not exactly the one we were living in at the time. The decor of most of his planets, moons and asteroids was dominated by rocks and vegetable market foliage. His version of Saturn reminds you of the Grand Canyon with giant cauliflower growing all over it. Neptune was similar, with more rocks. Even many sections of his United States seemed to have been taken over by some sort of vegetable blight. The alien races invented were usually a mixture of the vegetable and the phallic, often resembling cucumbers and gerkins.

THE POWERFUL, MYSTERIOUS
MAN FROM
OUTER SPACE—
SPACE-HAWK
by BASIL WOLVERTON
ON THE PLANET NEPTUNE IN THE KINGDOM OF KOOM A SHREWD OLD SCIENTIST NAMED DROON GLORTS AS HE VIEWS THE WAR TORN PLANET EARTH.
AH! THEY ARE STILL AT IT— THE FOOLS, AND NOW— SPACEHAWK IS ONLY A FEW THOUSAND MILES AWAY, I CAN GO AHEAD WITH MY PLAN!

While Spacehawk's adventures somewhat paralleled those of the pulp and newspaper science fiction heroes, there was nobody else who had encounters quite like his. He met the oddest aliens and creatures, prowled the most peculiar planets and experienced some of the most cockeyed incidents of any of the interplanetary dogooders. On Mars he prevented a sore-loser green political candidate from smashing a moon into the planet, on Saturn he casually admits to being eight hundred years old and once on Uranus he transplanted the brain of a dying friend into


THERE GOES OUR LAST CHANCE OF CATCHING THE CHAMELEON—THEY MUST ONLY BE ORDINARY POLICEMEN!
DOCTOR TIMES!!
THERE GOES OUR ONLY A RAW CLUE!
WHILE CUSSING ON THE ROOF, THE TWO CRIMES SHOT THE FLEEING CHAMELEON—
THERE THEY GO, TOMMY—HEADED FOR THAT SEDAN! LETS GET AFTER THEM!
BRONCO, HERALDING THE COMMOTION, ATTEMPTS TO KEEP THEM FROM ENTERING....
SIT TIGHT, SENATOR-!
AWK-! STOP 'EM-!
THE Chameleon !

THE TARGET!

the gigantic body of a warty green hornosaur.

One of the major appeals of the Spacehawk epic is the artwork. Wolverton was fond of all the intricate timeconsuming pen and ink techniques that had brightened the work of earlier newspaper cartoonists such as Winsor McCay. He was very good at gadgets, especially the kind requiring lots of nuts and bolts. His spaceships have the bulk and feel of ocean liners, their control rooms as cluttered with pipes and dials as an apartment house basement. A "Spacehawk" splash panel gives you a condensed history of fifty years of pen and ink rendering techniques and during that period it would take Wolverton a full day to do a page. The lone wolf of space's popularity waned after he returned to Earth, just as Wolverton predicted it would. But novelty insisted he tone the feature down. Spacehawk was last seen in the December, 1942 issue.

The Chameleon, the magazine's resident master of disguise, began his career in the sixth issue. So skilled was he at hiding his identity that nobody found out his real name until the September, 1941 issue. Only then did we learn that he is Pete Stockbridge, "member of one of the oldest and wealthiest families in America."

Made shy by the interest the world took in his millions and "to avoid the staring eyes of the public, Pete developed the art of makeup and disguise. He became a wonder with grease paint and putty—could change his appearance in a flash—and was thus dubbed 'The Chameleon' by his few friends." While he had no superpowers and was just an amateur detective with a gift for disguise, he was an appealing character. The idea that you could become an old man, a Chinese waiter or a tough stevedore in a matter of minutes and fool everybody is one that is fascinating to kids. At least it was back then. You hardly minded not being exactly certain how to pronounce Chameleon.

A couple of artists, most notably Everett, worked on the earliest episodes. Then Bob Davis took over the drawing and, presumably, the scripting. He had a simple, somewhat diagramatic style and both his interior and exterior shots were rich with detail. His layouts and his patient rendering of props and backdrops was akin to the sort of stuff to be found in the European comic book work of such people as Herge.

Davis' breathless plots borrowed heavily from pulp magazines and movies. Among his recurrent villains were a fat sinister hypnotist (who was so effective he could even put a gorilla into a trance) and an eyepatch-wearing blackguard known as Dr. Knife. When he was killed in an auto accident, he was succeeded on the feature by Al Fagaly. After that the Chameleon became a dull fellow.

Finally, in the tenth issue, **Target** Comics got a hero named the Target. He had a big bullseye emblazoned on the front of his costume and seemed to be asking for trouble. And in a way the Target was, smug in the knowledge that lead would bounce off him. Bob Wood, who a couple of years later would join Charles Biro in editing **Boy, Daredevil** and **Crime Does Not Pay**, was responsible for the strip. He used some Biro touches in the early stories. In the first adventure, for instance, the identity of the audacious Target is kept a secret and in the final panel Wood asks us, "Who is the Target? And how can it be that he has been seen in three different places at the same time??? And in different colored uniforms???"

In the second episode we learn that the Target is actually Niles Reed, a metallurgy major and four letter man while at college. After his older brother, Mahatan's District Attorney, is killed as a result of a gangland frameup, Niles decides to use "this flexible bulletproof metal I've discovered" to fight crime. He designs a suit of bulletproof underwear and becomes the Target. At the same time two young men who're equally ticked off at crime, Dave Mansfield and Tommy Foster by name, join him and get bulletproof suits, too. They call themselves the Targeteers.

Each subsequent story ended with a teaser and numerous provocative questions—"Who pretended to be Colonel Cushing? Who impersonated the bellboy at the hotel? Will the TARGET and TARGETEERS catch up with the midget,

SPECK SPOT THE SIS..
GAR-R-UMP-BUY THOSE POP BUY CANDY FROM SPECKS
SPECK'S JUST A FRECKLED-FACED BOY BOMED DOWN WITH SISTER TROUBLES--AND BC BUSINESS DEALS COMES TO THE FACT HE'S THE ONLY DEALER IN FUNNY MAGAZINES IN THE LARGE AND PROSPEROUS TOWN-POP-OUT ON 1965--OF SYARTSBURG. HE'S CONSIDERED RICH BY A LITTLE SISTER
10¢
ONE DOLLAR!
CHEEKY CHUNK!
FUNNY
HOOF HOOF!

'MIGHTY MITE,' and the mysterious foreign agent before they can complete their sinister mission against the American government???" So it went, one darn thing after the other. Murderous midgets, crazed scientists, a green faced gent known as Dr. Time, etc.

During his tenure on the feature, which ended with the August, 1941 issue, Wood had considerable assistance from George "Inky" Roussos. Roussos was also helping out on Batman at the time and the shadowy buildings and night streets of the Target's turf look very much like those of Gotham City. Since the Target stories often made use of shots of newspaper front pages to further the narrative, Roussos name would pop up now and then in lesser headlines—"Inky Roussos Finally Meets Deadline, Entire Publishing World Amazed"—as would those of some of his contemporaries—"Jerry Robinson, Famous Etcher, Finishes First Job In 3 Years." Roussos even appeared as a character in "The Case of the Cartoon Crimes" and he's introduced while pondering "laboriously over his drawing board." Although Roussos is a suspect, the guilty party turns out to be a publisher.

After Wood a succession of artists took a turn. Sid Greene did an interesting, and highly individual, job, followed by Edward Ryan, W.M. Allison and others of less talent. The Target and the Targeteers were last seen in the fall of 1948.

AND A RETREAT

When **Target Comics** was barely a year old it began to exhibit conservative tendencies. Spacehawk was, as noted, toned down and restricted to concentrating "his efforts on defending the one great land of real freedom—America." And in Vol. 2, No. 2 (April, 1941) a sedate adaptation of **Treasure Island** began running under the Fantastic Films marquee. Tarpe Mills was gone and this **Classic Comics** precursor was drawn by the veteran illustrator Harold DeLay. Artwork for the early **Classic Comics**, by the way, was also provided by **Funnies, Inc.** Little of it as good as DeLay's. The serialization of the Stevenson novel was followed by **The Last of the Mohicans** and then **Gulliver's Travels**. Gulliver even showed up on a cover, indicating the deemphasis of the superheroes.

The June, 1941 issue saw the advent of "The Cadet.—We give you Kit Carter, son of a former hero of the famous Fighting 69th. . . Kit, as a student of Dauntion Military Academy, will be with you each month in your favorite magazine." Novelty had by this time started **Blue Bolt Comics** and in that title Dick Cole, wonder boy and military cadet, had pushed aside all the superheroes to take over the leading spot. Kit Carter was about to do the same thing. The somewhat stodgy strip was the creation of writer Ray Gill and artist Art Gates. It perked up a few months later when John Jordan took over the drawing.

By January, 1942 the Cadet was being showcased on the cover. Novelty was the only publisher to have much luck with this sort of school boy hero stuff, a type of adventure yarn that had been popular in the dime novels and fiction weeklies and was still highly admired in England.

Most of the other additions to the roster were on the funny side. Jack Warren's "Speck, Spot and Sis" dealt with a small town boy, his pudgy little sister and his faithful shaggy dog. "Al T. Tude" began as the saga of an inept airplane grasemonkey, then turned into a superhero parody when Art Gates began working on it. "Dan'l Flannel" took place in the last century and covered life on the Mississippi. Its big naive hero was a sort of Li'l Abner in coonskin cap. Bart Tumey thought it up.

The contents remained pretty much the same from volume to volume. The war took some of the better Funnies, Inc. crewmen and the second team went to work on **Target**. Don Rico introduced another boy hero in the middle 1940s in the person of Gary Stark. The magazine ceased publication in the summer of 1949.

CF

HEROES

BY JAMES VAN HISE

It was 1963 and the Marvel Age of Comics was still abomin'. The Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spider-Man and Thor had been ushered in and their success only insured that more weird heroes would follow.

The one which moved the furthest afield from the emerging Marvel mythos was Dr. Strange. While his garb can be termed a costume, his abilities are not the aftershock of exposure to gamma rays or the bite of a radioactive whatzit. In one sense he could be compared to Thor in that his abilities are magical and his acquisition of them opened up his life to a whole new realm. He crossed the threshold revealing vistas undreamed of by mortals even as extraordinary as the Fantastic Four. Dr. Strange moves beyond Earth and outside Asgard into dimensions where sorcery holds sway. But not all of these parallel worlds are removed from involvement with our own. Some are so close that they touch in certain select places while others feed off ours, such as the world of Nightmare.

When "Dr. Strange—Master of Black Magic!" was introduced in **Strange Tales** 110 (July 1963), he was intended as a heroic backup feature for the already successful Human Torch solo strip which was featured in that title. But Strange was not Marvel's first attempt at a mystic master. Some months before, an occult character named *Doctor Droom* had appeared in a handful of issues of **Amazing Fantasy**. The character was dropped and not seen again until he was reprinted in the Seventies in **Weird Wonder Tales** 19, with his name changed to *Dr. Druid* (so as not to create confusion with the popular villain Dr. Doom).

Dr. Strange: Master Of The Mystic Arts

ARCANE ANCESTORS

In **Origins of Marvel Comics** by Stan Lee, he credits the inspiration for Dr. Strange to his own childhood infatuation with the **Chandu the Magician** radio drama. Although unable to recall any details about the broadcast character, the show's ambiance nonetheless stayed with him. It was this groping to recapture the style of a mage who could create a sense of wonder that resulted in the powerful image of Dr. Strange.

"In the beginning we kept cautiously feeling our way with Dr. Strange," Lee recalls. "But, as the series picked up steam, as we got to know him better, the same thing happened that had happened to Thor. We began, almost despite ourselves, to create an entire universe for him—a universe peopled with very special characters and very special attributes, and with what proved most exciting to me, a very special language."

While some fans imagined Lee delving into obscure necromantic tomes to come up with the spells and exclamations Dr. Strange uttered, he actually searched no further than his own imagination. Lee wanted words and phrases which would sound weird. What could be stranger than : "By the hoary hosts of Hoggoth"; "The eternal Vishanti"; "The shades of the shadowy Seraphim"; "The all-seeing eye of Agamotto"; "The seven rings of Raggadorr"; "the flames of the Faltine";"The name of Satannish"? It was like falling down stairs for the guy who'd been conjuring up such creepies as Fin Fang Foom and Grottu for Marvel's monster books.

But the fans believed otherwise.

"Dr. Strange, which I always thought would prove exceptionally appealing to our younger readers, began to develop a cult among those at the other end of the spectrum," Lee explains. "Suddenly the mail started pouring in—from colleges, if you will. In ever-increasing numbers students were actually devoting term papers and theses to the language of Dr. Strange, investigating the derivation of his various spells and incantations. And the payoff was—many, many of those theses explained, in detailed chapter and verse, how I had obviously borrowed from the ancient Druid (sic) writings, or from forbidden Egyptian hieroglyphics, or at least the works of H.P. Lovecraft. Then my correspondants would explain the relationship of Raggadorr to Ragnarok, or trace the origin of the eternal Vishanti right back to the Book of Genesis." They'd then ask Lee to confirm their research, when all he'd done was fabricate names to fit the occasions.

"Finally I copped out by admitting I had been a vociferous reader in my younger days, and perhaps I had subconsciously retained a lot of what I'd read only to use it later in recording the saga of Dr. Strange. No need to tell them I'd never studied Egyptian hieroglyphics and wouldn't know any ancient Druid (sic) writings if they were tattooed on my dome."

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOURS

The artwork of Steve Ditko enabled Lee's early visions of the character to be realized to their fullest. Ditko drew the strip from its first installment in 1963 until he left Marvel over

A CITRO MASTERPIECE:

DORMAMMU
VS.
ETERNITY

© 1986 Marvel Comics Group

creative differences with the July 1966 issue, #146, exactly three years later.

Ditko's weird stories in **Strange Tales**, **Journey Into Mystery** et al, best capture the milieu which Lee had been striving for. Ditko's renderings are of a world where things drip and ooze, where shadows seem to breathe and the unusual can radiate true menace. It is this artistic realm that he brought to Dr. Strange.

In the very first story, Dr. Strange encounters Nightmare, whom he refers to as his "ancient foe!" This could be interpreted as meaning that the foe is ancient or that Dr. Strange has been menaced by this character for ages! Since later events reveal that Dr. Strange only recently acquired his arcane talents, we must assume the former definition. Indeed, nightmares have always plagued the dreams of men.

"Face-To-Face With The Magic of Baron Mordo!" in issue 111 of **Strange Tales** introduces Baron Mordo, who would become to Dr. Strange what Dr. Doom has been to the Fantastic Four. Like the previous adventure, this one is only six pages long and basically has Mordo attacking the Ancient One (who was introduced in the first story) whereupon Strange comes to his assistance.

Two issues elapse before the mystic master's return, which also marks the return of Baron Mordo. Issue 114 introduces Victoria Bentley, a young woman with dormant magical talents. She reappears in the strip periodically over the years.

Issue 115 reveals the origin of Dr. Strange for the first time in a story which swells the strip to a full eight pages in length. The tale is of arrogant physician Dr. Steven Strange, a brilliant surgeon who loses his ability to operate after an accident. He becomes a tramp who hears of the Ancient One—a man who can supposedly cure anything. But when he tracks him down, Strange finally comes to terms with himself and asks to become the Ancient One's student. An expanded version of this origin, which basically just adds a lot of wind without any added insight, appears in issue 169, written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Dan Adkins. The idea of an expanded origin for Dr. Strange remains a great idea waiting to happen.

Issue 116 features "Return To The Nightmare World!" and shows once again that Steve Ditko is the undisputed master at portraying alien vistas filled with spidery shadows and tentacled landscapes. I believe that this story marks Ditko's first use of the dimensional pathway suspended in the air which leads through a gigantic set of disembodied toothy jaws (an image used frequently by other artists who want to immediately establish the unearthliness of their images).

"The Possessed!" in issue 118 is an unusual Dr. Strange story for a couple reasons, primarily in that it is a science fiction story about aliens attempting to invade Earth. Dr. Strange drives them out with his occult powers in this truly evocative little piece of weird fiction. The story also includes an oddity not often seen in the series over its 22 year run—a miniature replica of the Earth which reveals to Strange where supernatural forces are at work in the world. In this case, the presence of the aliens is regarded as a supernatural force!

"The House of Shadows!" in issue 120 continues the trend of stories told complete within eight or nine pages (something which is hard to imagine in comics today). It's a haunted house story much as you might have expected to read in the pre-hero issues of **Strange Tales**, wherein the house itself is a living being. It also has great scenes of Dr. Strange, in full regalia, walking nonchalantly down the street while people point and whisper, as well as an ending which emphasizes how removed he is from ordinary men. In later years this facet would gradually be replaced by Strange attempting to live normally alongside humanity. The fact that he stood so apart without complaint in these early issues actually made him different from all other Marvel superheroes.

AN END AND A BEGINNING

In issue 123, Dr. Strange meets a very natural foe, and yet the conflict he should continue to pose is never again mentioned. Loki, the god of evil and master of magic in Asgard, tries to trick Dr. Strange into stealing Thor's hammer for him. Their short-lived battle ends when Loki detects Thor and flees in panic. This story is certainly not all it could be. Also at this time, George Bell was inking Ditko's pencils and diminishing their effectiveness.

Baron Mordo seems to turn up every other issue, but then in 126, with Ditko again inking his own pencils, a character is introduced whose name had previously only been mentioned with dread—Dormammu! The story features many elements now considered classic in the mythos, including Clea. It would be several years after Ditko left the strip, though, before Clea would become Strange's disciple and lover.

Issue 127 contains the climax to the Dormammu encounter as well as having the Ancient One award Strange a new cloak and amulet (the ornate red cloak we are most familiar with). As in **Spider-Man**, Ditko's last year-and-a-half on this series feature some of his finest art. That he left Marvel at the height of his creative powers was truly that company's loss.

Issue 130 begins a multipart saga which concludes in 141 involving Baron Mordo in conspiracy with Dormammu against Dr. Strange. It was reprinted in 1984 in **Doctor Strange Classics** 1-4.

This saga has a sequel in 146 when, for the first time in his series, Doctor Strange is given the complete cover of the magazine. Ironically, it was Ditko's swan song on the series, featuring the clash between Dormammu and Eternity (the latter being sort of an early version of The Beyonder, but much more strange and mysterious). With Ditko's departure from Marvel, his influence is that of a departing giant rather than the on-going creative guiding force Jack Kirby would remain throughout the remainder of the Sixties. The wild scenes and full page shots portrayed in this story—aptly titled "The End—At Last"—show that Ditko had just been warming up. It was almost as though he was saying, "See! This is what you're losing!" That Ditko's departure from Marvel was less than amicable is well-known. It would be 15 years before he would draw for Marvel again.

After Ditko, the series would hunt for identity for years to come. That Ditko contributed much of the strip's creative spirit was quickly evident. Story after story searched for a now elusive balance in structure and style.

Artists who drew it in the months that followed included the legendary Bill Everett (through issue 152), Marie Severin

a pantheon of primus covers

(through 160) and Dan Adkins (who would carry the title through 171 as either penciller and/or inker when it had become its own title). Issue 169 marked the end of **Strange Tales** and the beginning of the Doctor's own title, continuing the old numbering. Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD, spun off into its own title. It had been sharing space in **Strange Tales** with Doctor Strange for about 35 issues. Unfortunately, it only lasted a couple of years on its own. The Master of the Mystic Arts still continues after only a two year hiatus in the early Seventies.

Issue 172 marks the Doctor's long-awaited return to greatness. After searching and searching, the right creative team at last came together in the form of Roy Thomas and Gene Colan. Together they captured the energy and creativity long missing from these adventures. But the book was still in trouble. While fans cherished these issues, Marvel was clearly desperate when in 177 Dr. Strange's costume is altered so that he looks like a superhero. He now wears a mask similar to the Black Panther, and his stories are replete with guest-stars such as the Black Knight in 178. The title was discontinued with 183 (Nov. 1969).

It is the July 1963 issue of **Strange Tales** in which Dr. Strange first appears, and the July 1966 issue in which Steve Ditko bows out. Now in the July 1972 issue of **Marvel Premiere**(issue three to be exact), Doctor Strange is revived—and in grand form!

During the two years Dr. Strange's title resided in limbo, a new young artist took his place in the ranks of Marvel's talent pool. Barry Smith, most closely identified with **Conan**, drew the return of the Master of the Mystic Arts in issue three and four of **Marvel Premiere**. Stan Lee scripted the first appearance and Archie Goodwin the second. Of the two, "While the World Spins Mad" in issue three is the most effective in both story and art (the inking is by Dan Adkins, who also brought out the best of Smith's pencils on **Conan**). Issue four is inked by Frank Brunner and while good, looks more like Brunner and less like Smith. Issues five through eight of **Marvel Premiere** have indifferent inking by a number of artists. But with issue nine, the writer/artist team of Steve Englehart and Frank Brunner took over.

Periodically Doctor Strange seems to be helmed by a team who plunge into the character with incredible vigor and push the boundaries of the stories to the limit. Once again this happened with Englehart and Brunner. The storyline builds through **Marvel Premiere** 14 wherein the character of Cagliostro goes back through time (with Strange and Mordo) to become God and create the universe!

Brunner has stated that when Stan Lee saw this some months after publication, he wanted it all to be revealed as a dream sequence because Marvel had essentially said that God was really just a renegade wizard transformed! But no such addendum was ever done. The story stands to this day as Marvel's version of the story of Creation & Genesis!

Doctor Strange went immediately from **Marvel Premiere** into his own title, with the team of Englehart & Brunner intact. But while Englehart would remain with the title, Brunner's final issue would be number 6.

When Gene Colan returned in fine form in issue 8, Steve Englehart remained, his enthusiasm undampened. But reportedly ordered to write a bicentennial story to appear in the spring of 1976, it played such havoc with his planned continuity that he left the title after issue 18.

Clea has become a prominent fixture in the series by this time, but the focus is slipping once again. As though to emphasize this, issue 21 is a reprint, the cover on it actually belonging on the following issue while the fine Frank Brunner cover of issue 22 belongs on number 23!

Rudy Nebres was doing excellent art on the title and teamed up with Jim Starlin with issue 24. But Starlin didn't remain long enough to leave his mark the way he did on **Captain Marvel** and **Warlock**.

GATHERINGS

Roger Stern, the main writer of the chronicles of the mystery master in recent years, joined the book with issue 27. Talented interim artists did some fine work in this period. Frank Brunner did an occasional cover and Gene Colan returned

to the interiors with issue 36.

Chris Claremont brought his unique vision beginning with issue 38 while Michael Golden did a few spectacular covers along the way with issues 42—44. During Claremont's reign, Clea finally became more than just Strange's disciple—she became his lover. Roger Stern and Michael Golden created a beautiful five page vignette of the two as a backup in issue 46. Stern returned as the regular scripter with issue 47 and number 48 marked the premiere of Marshall Rogers as the artist, a stay which, while brief, would be most memorable. Each issue is meticulous in execution, one of the most interesting being issue 53. This one reveals that Dr. Strange was on hand in his invisible ectoplasmic form in ancient Egypt at the time of the Fantastic Four's time travel adventure there originally related in F.F. 20. This would mark Roger's final issue as artist, but his six issues remain classics.

One of the best artists in comics, Michael Golden makes a rare appearance crafting issue 55. In 56, Paul Smith did a single issue which would be a harbinger of things to come.

"Deliver Us From Evil" in issue 62 contains an event which brought about a change in the Marvel universe when Doctor Strange magically removes all vampirism from the Earth.

Paul Smith returned to the art chores in issue 65 with splendid results. Issue 66 is an offbeat fable of an incarnation of a high lama residing in a New York man who loves cable tv and pizza with extra cheese. One of Smith's best issues is "Sword & Sorcery" guest-starring the Black Knight in issue 68. Smith did issue 69 but left 70 to Bret Blevins. That story, "Deadly Exchange," is a nuclear proliferation parable involving beings in another dimension obtaining an atomic bomb.

In issues 71—73, Paul Smith does his final three issues on the title as Roger Stern relates the final conflict with Umar and the secret origin of Clea (who is actually Umar's daughter). While Strange still loves Clea, she must now rule her people in the aftermath of Umar's overthrow.

Mark Badger (who drew the **Gargoyle** mini-series) is now the artist on Dr. Strange, bringing his own unique talents to the series.

Dr. Strange has turned up in various places over the years, from **The Defenders** to **Marvel Team-Up** 76. Two of the most interesting were **What If?** 18 ("What If Dr. Strange Were a Disciple of Dormammu?" by Peter Gillis, Tom Sutton and Bruce Patterson) and number 40 ("What If Dr. Strange had not become a Master of the Mystic Arts?" by Peter Gillis, Butch Guice and Sam Grainger).

When the regular title increased its page count, some inventory material, now several pages short, was fed into **Marvel Fanfare** in issues five, six and eight. The fact that three of the four are inked by Craig Russell seems to indicate that they were just pencils until it was decided to prepare them for publication.

Curiously, there has been only one Dr. Strange annual. Published in 1976, it was drawn by Craig Russell and co-plotted with Marv Wolfman. A cover drawn by Russel for the issue remains unpublished as editor Wolfman rejected it. Russell was so upset by the manner in which his cover was replaced (claiming that he wasn't told until it was too late for him to alter or replace it himself), that he refused to share the pages of art with Wolfman as is the usual policy when Marvel returns artwork. Instead he peeled off the word balloons he had affixed to the art and returned those to Wolfman.

One of the best Doctor Strange reprints available is the tabloid size **Marvel Treasury Edition** six which reprints stories by Ditko, Everett, Severin, Adkins, Colan and Brunner with original front and back covers by Brunner.

While Dr. Strange has never been as high profile a character as Spider-Man, Captain America and others, for 22 years, his unique realm has produced some of the brightest spots of creativity in the Marvel Age of Comics.

CF

Animated Antics

BY JAMES VAN HISE

Animation fests bring out the unusual and the little seen. In October of 1985, LA's Animation Celebration presented one of the most unique program features of all, chuck Jones, probably the greatest living animation director and the guiding light behind Bugs Bunny and other Warner Brothers stars, was introduced and interviewed by Ray Bradbury, one of the world's most popular writers of imaginative fiction.

RAY BRADBU
FRIENDS

Ray Bradbury opened the evening by introducing his long time friend:

"I'm here for a very special reason. Nineteen years ago, a friend of mine took me to meet Chuck Jones for the first time. It was love at first sight; we've been friends ever since. At least once a month, back in those years, I'd go out to his studio and we'd go up in the tower and have some fabulous martinis and some incredible talk. Chuck has been calling me over the years—every time he has a joke he wants to tell someone, he calls me.

"He loves to read the **Encyclopedia Britannica**. He calls me and says, 'Do you know...?' and I say, 'No, what is it this time?' And he's dug out some fantastic thing. I remember he called about ten years ago and said, 'Did you know that when they were building the Trans-Egyptian railroad a hundred years ago and ran out of fuel for the locomotive, they'd stop the cars in the middle of the desert, run into the nearest catacomb, bring mummies out of the tomb and stuff them into the firebox and use them for fuel?' I threw down the phone, rushed to my typewriter and wrote a poem called 'The Nephrititi—Tut Express.' Isn't that a wonderful friend to have? He's given me ideas for poems and for stories.

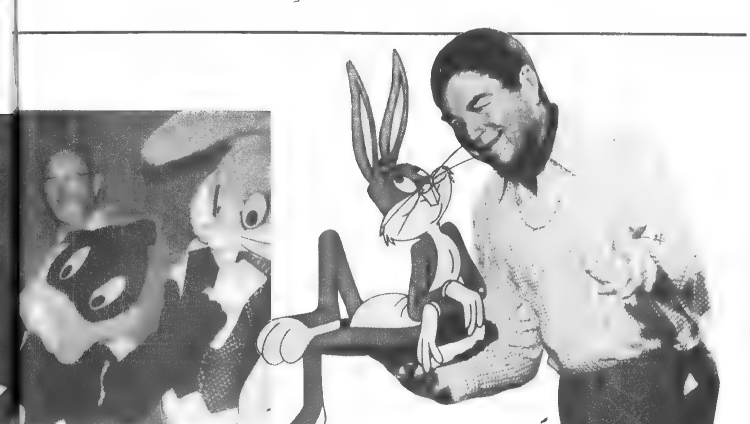
"I remember a fabulous encounter nineteen years ago, right after our first meeting. He said he'd like a poem about Halloween—that a really good poem has never been done about Halloween. I said 'Halloween? That's my favorite holiday.' Every Halloween when people call my house, my wife says, 'Well, Ray's not here. He's out tricking and treating!'

"So Chuck and I got to talking about this idea of doing a really good story on Halloween. I brought a painting to his studio that I'd done many years ago called *The Halloween Tree*. It was a large tree full of pumpkins with a figure strewn with leaves at the base of the tree. Chuck looked at it and said, 'My God, that's the history of Halloween! Let's go back in time and do a film on all of the death holidays through the ages, for two thousand years, up through Ireland and Scotland, America, South America, Mexico and back again.' I wrote the screenplay for **The Halloween Tree** and no sooner had we turned it in than MGM shut down its animation unit and threw us out into the street. I said the heck with it and wrote it into a book which is still around. And that's all because of Chuck Jones.

"I can't think of any better way to introduce my dear friend than to tell you these little anecdotes out of our shared past. And, I hope, our shared future."

Has anyone ever been introduced more grandly? Even Jones seemed overwhelmed by the praise of his friend.

RAY BRADBURY INTERVIEWS CHUCK JONES



RY **CHUCK JONES &**

"Being introduced by Bradbury is about like having Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck traveling with you," Jones observed. "You don't have to guess *Who's that?*

"I remember seeing a cartoon in **The New Yorker** a few years ago of an enormous statue with two little men standing at the base of it. The statue is of Custer's Last Stand, Hannibal crossing the Alps and all sorts of things. The artist is saying to the other man, 'It started out as a pair of bookends.' Which is kind of the way I feel about all this. It's a great opportunity to be up on this stage. We made these pictures with the faint hope that they might last three years."

THE NATURE OF HUMOR "There's one little anecdote I'd like to share," said Bradbury, obviously enjoying himself. "We had lunch about ten years ago with Steven Spielberg, before he started shooting **1941**. At lunch that day, Chuck warned Spielberg. We love him very much and think he's a terrific director, but nevertheless Chuck was trying to teach him the rules of comedy writing and characters—solid characters. Steven seemed to be listening. But when the film came out, we realized that he hadn't because there were no real characters.

"Chuck, would you say what you said to Steven that day as to what the basis is to making your films and characters?" Bradbury asked.

Said Jones, "I heard Ed Wynn say one time that a comedian is not somebody who opens a funny door, he's somebody who opens a door funny, and this is the essence of the whole matter. You have to have characters who are acting and who are comedians and it's a very difficult thing.

"When I was talking to Spielberg, I said that when you make comedy, you have got to have somebody you care about. I don't think you had anybody to care about in **1941**—they were all slobs.

"If you look at my cartoons," Jones continues, "I don't think there are any characters that are really funny-looking. When people buy the cels of the characters (much to my

surprise), I think that it's like having a picture of a favorite uncle."

Bradbury made an observation which contrasted film comedy of today with the comedy of yesteryear.

"I find it fascinating that in film history of the last ten and twenty years, you have very few comedians who have body language. Bob Hope has been a favorite for a good many years, but he's a mouth—that's all he is. There's no one in film comedy in recent years who has body language, except in cartoons."

Jones explained how this relates to his style of directing animation. "In our cartoons, we always did them in the pencil test stage without any backgrounds to see how they would play on a bare stage. This was equally true of Bugs Bunny, Pepe LePeu and the talkative characters, and we could usually tell if there was something wrong. I was once told by someone who works in motion pictures that if you can watch something for ten minutes without the sound and it still interests you, then it's well acted. If it doesn't, forget it.

"The thing that always impressed me about Ray's work, and I hope about our work, too," Jones adds, "is that he tried to make his stuff believable. I don't think that anything can be funny, mysterious or scary unless you believe it. We never tried to use drawings—we tried to do drawings of characters. One of the best lines I ever heard was when I was introduced to a little boy as 'the man who draws Bugs Bunny,' and he said, 'He does not draw Bugs Bunny, he draws pictures of Bugs Bunny.' Hopefully that's the way it was. I was lucky because I worked with Tex Avery and Fritz Freleng. They were the two best directors of character animation who ever lived."

Jones explained how sound plays an important part in his technique. He recalls that in the old days they were able to integrate music in important ways because their animation unit was part of a major studio.

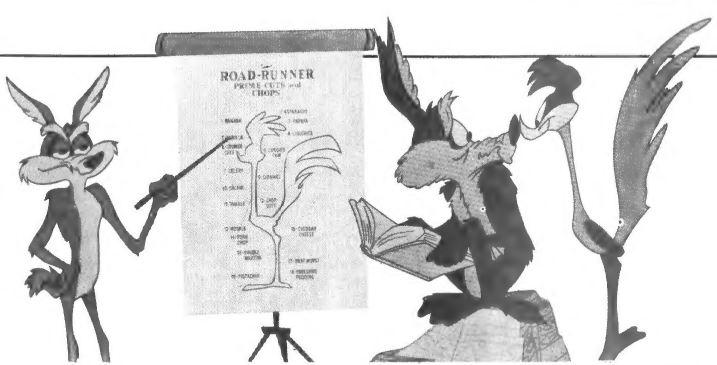
"Whenever we made a musical picture, such as 'One Froggy Evening' and 'What's Opera, Doc?' we had a full orchestra. The Warner Brothers orchestra was under contract. It was a seventy piece orchestra, and we could use them for about $3.50 an hour! When we made a picture like that we never fooled around but played the music as richly as we could. When we have seventy pieces they play pretty well. When we did fool around, we tried to integrate but never overlap. Every sound effect was in congress."

On the subject of sound effects, Jones revealed how a popular effect used in the Road Runner cartoons came about.

"You may remember that when the Coyote would fall off the cliff, he'd make that little plop. There was a time when everybody thought that sound effects should be very loud. No matter how far away the thing was, you made a big crash out of it. One time we were dubbing a picture and the sound had been turned way down. The technician forgot to turn it way up. When the plop came in the frame, for the first time in my life I saw an editor respond to something. He fell over backwards laughing! I'd never actually seen anyone do that before. He got up and said, 'I'm gonna' have to fix that.' I said that I didn't want him to touch that knob. 'What the hell do you think you were laughing at?,' I said."

Jones also wanted to tell the story of how Daffy Duck got his familiar voice. The director feared that there were erroneous versions of this tale flying around.

"Originally he sounded really crazy. Then when Tex Avery was directing a picture called 'Porky's Duck Hunt,' or something like that, he wasn't quite satisfied with the voice. So they were all sitting there when Leon Schlesinger came in. Schlesinger had a lisp of his own and he sounded like a fifth string Larry Cohen. Someone there said, 'That's a good voice for Daffy.' I said, 'You bet it would.' 'At least



it'd be kind of funny,' Tex said. The only thing they forgot is that Leon was going to have to see this picture!" *(Note: Leon Schlesinger was their boss.)* "What would he say when he heard this voice from the duck? It wasn't very difficult to anticipate. So we all made out our resignations when the picture was ready to be shown. Leon had a throne at the back of the room, up on a pedestal, as I remember it. It was gold, I think. After the film he looked up and said, 'Jesus Christ, that was a funny voice. Where did you get it?' "

A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE As he had at the beginning, Bradbury once again summed up the style of the cartoons made by Chuck Jones. And just what it is about them that continues to make them loved across the decades.

"Seeing Chuck's films again reminds me of when people say that I've really got to see certain films because they're good for me, like medicine. I have a theory—and I think Chuck will agree with me—that there are two ways to handle reality in this world. Cartoons are one way and the other way is through science fiction and fantasy.

"Reality is too real, we already know it," Bradbury insists. "By the time we're a certain age, sometimes very early, we know just about everything there is to know about the real world. Death and the mysteries of life, existence, it's too much for us. The way to handle it is not to wet your finger and stick it in a socket and electrocute yourself—that's what realism does for us. There's got to be a way of handling that so that we can all make do, help us get through the day—help us get through the night.

"One of the ways is by reversing things, seeing things in mirrors or seeing things the way Chuck Jones sees them so that we can say, 'Yes, there really is life.' There's nothing in these cartoons that doesn't represent life, that great shout of laughter so that we could survive for another day. Without that I think we're sunk.

"What I'm saying is illustrated by the original **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**, which came out in the Fifties and which we all love, right? You put people through these series of adventures which are dreadful—they're in dreadful danger the whole evening and finally you get some relief. He does escape. He does prove his point. He does warn the world that we're being invaded by these pod creatures. The new version that came out a few years ago does the reverse! You go through all this agony and suffering and trying to warn people and at the end it's total despair; total destruction. There's no hope. You might as well give up and die.

"I don't see that message at all. You cannot have that message," states Bradbury. "We have to have some hope. We have to have happy endings. That's what happy endings are for. If we accept the message of doom and gloom, I don't see how we can possibly survive.

"My function, and the function of Chuck here, is to make you get out and become optimal behaviorists. That's what we want to do and his films want me to behave optimally, which is very important. To be filled with optimism is ridiculous, but to behave optimally is possible for every single one of you!"

What higher tribute could be paid to one's life's work? Chuck Jones accepted the compliment well when he responded by saying, "It's nice to have someone as bright as Bradbury explain what you've done right." CF

JAMES VAN HISE IS THE EDITOR OF MOVIELAND *AND A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF* COMICS FEATURE.

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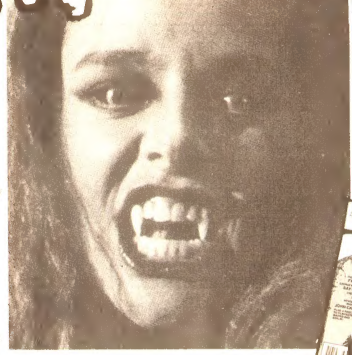

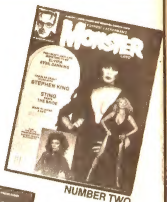

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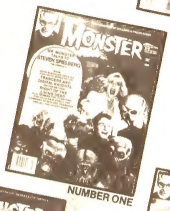

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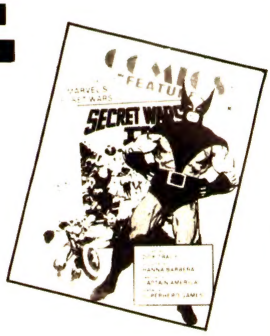

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